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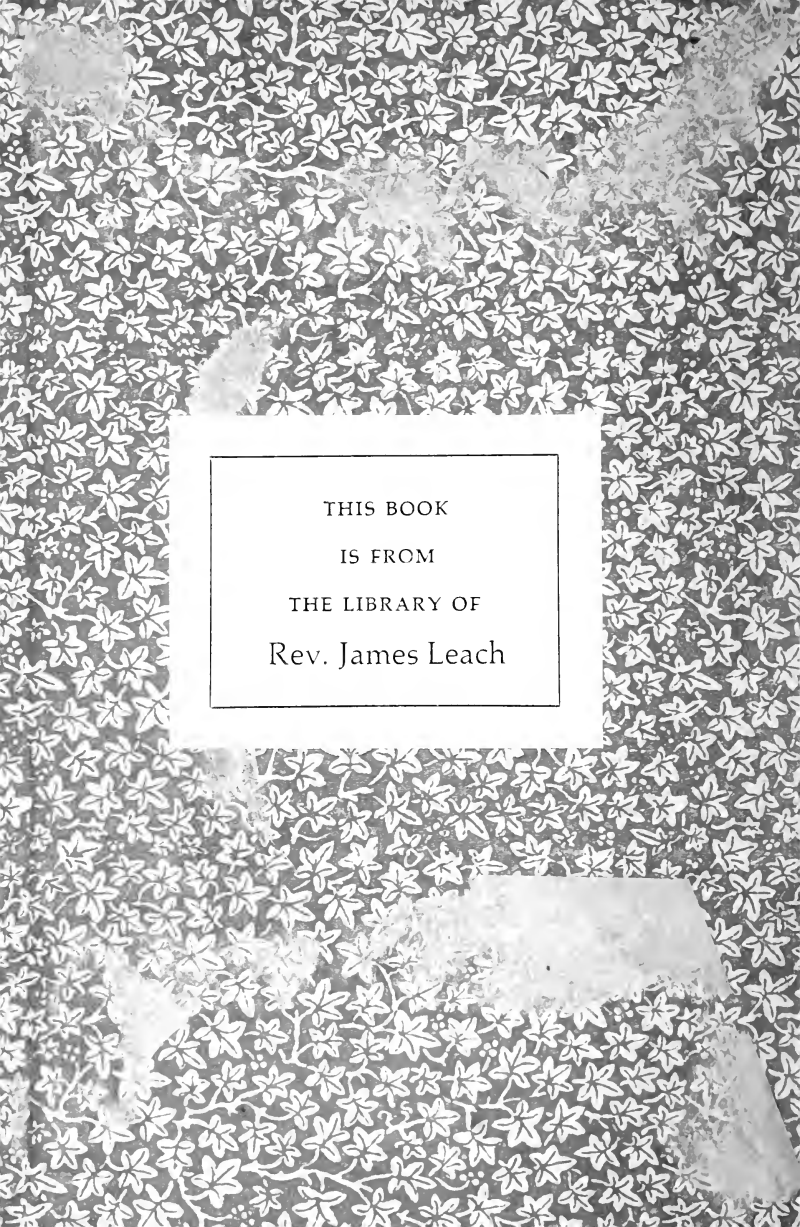
FE AND TIMES OF JOHN WYCLIFFE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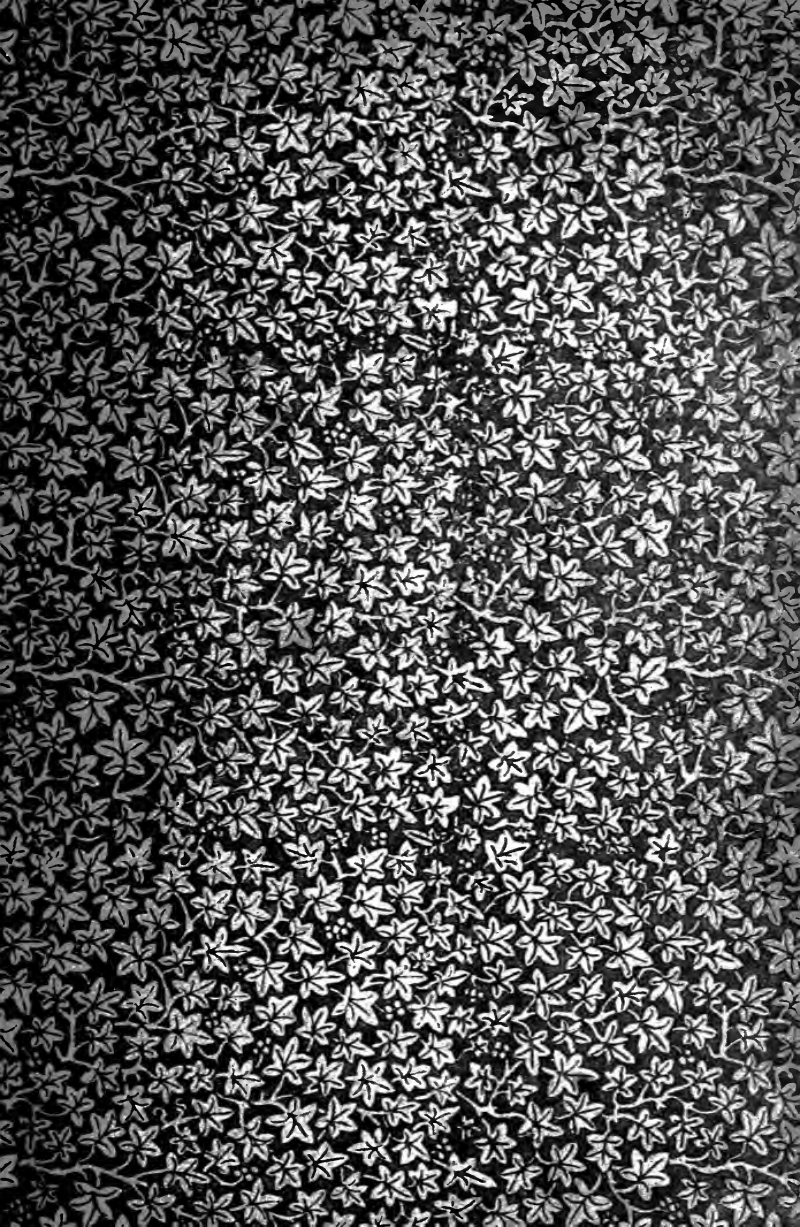

LIFE AND TIMES

OF

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

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JOHN WYCLIFFE. *Frontispiece.*

LIFE AND TIMES

OF

JOHN WYCLIFFE

The Morning Star

of the

Reformation

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY:
56, Paternoster Row, 65, St. Paul's Churchyard,
1884.

"Wycliffe is disinterred,
Yea, his dry bones to ashes are consumed,
And flung into the brook that travels near:
Forthwith that ancient Voice which streams can hear
Thus speaks—(that Voice which walks upon the wind,
Though seldom heard by busy human kind),
As thou these ashes, little brook, will bear
Into the Avon—Avon to the tide
Of Severn—Severn to the narrow seas—
Into mid ocean they—this deed accurst
An emblem yields to friends and enemies,
How the bold teacher's doctrine, sanctified
By Truth, shall spread, through all the world dispersed."

WORDSWORTH.

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JUL 17 1967
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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

EAR by year it is better understood that John of Wycliffe was not only one of the greatest men in English history, but the true precursor of the English Reformation. The truths to which he was the intrepid witness never wholly passed from the minds of our countrymen; and amid the bitter persecutions which seemed to crush Lollardry out of existence there remained an amount of secret but imperishable conviction which prepared the way for the great events of the sixteenth century.

The materials for a biography of Wycliffe are but scanty. His writings are in no sense autobiographical. For many important particulars respecting his life and work we are indebted mainly to his enemies. John Foxe, however, the martyrologist, has preserved some important particulars, and the later biographers of Wycliffe, the Rev. John Lewis (1719), with Drs. Vaughan and Lechler in our own times, have explored all accessible sources of information with admirable care and skill. To their works the writer of the following sketch is largely indebted; while he has also availed himself of the labours of the late Professor Shirley, of Mr. Thomas Arnold, the editor of Wycliffe's English works, and of Mr. Forshall and

Sir Frederick Madden, the joint editors of the Wycliffite English Bible, printed at the Clarendon Press in 1850. Other authors are occasionally quoted. The references to Lechler's valuable Life of the Reformer apply to the English edition prepared and annotated by the late Dr. Lorimer.

It is much to be hoped that the increased attention now given to the Reformer's character and writings under the impulse of the Quincentenary Commemoration of his death in 1384 will lead not only to a demand for the publication of his hitherto unprinted works, but to an estimate of his place in history which shall deepen our gratitude to God for the great teachers by whom He has spoken to every age, and awaken a deeper comprehension of the long and wonderful chain of events by which faith and freedom have been secured in our own beloved country.

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LIFE AND TIMES OF WYCLIFFE.

CHAPTER I.

Christianity in England from its Introduction to the Fourteenth Century.

THE history of Christianity in Great Britain before the Saxon invasion is a study almost as difficult as it is fascinating. Amidst myth and legend only a few authentic records remain; while some great names and heroic deeds have left their memorials. The probability is that during the Roman occupation the Gospel was quietly introduced into the land, perhaps by Christian soldiers, perhaps by evangelists from the East. Certainly, many of the usages of the British churches, so far as their record has come down to us, appear to have conformed rather to Eastern than to Western custom; and a marked feature common to the churches of Britain and Gaul, which were in constant intercommunion, was their independence of the Roman Bishop. It is not, indeed, maintained that the doctrine of these churches remained pure, in an era of widespread corruption; and the glowing pictures of the British chroniclers, reproduced in our own age

with so much power by the fascinating pen of Dr. Merle D'Aubigné,[1] must be accepted with some reserve. What is certain is that even when Saxon heathenism had overspread the land, large communities of Britons maintained the profession of Christianity, and that when Augustine and his monks came over in the sixth century, some of their keenest conflicts were with the still independent British churches. For a time, the rival communities existed side by side; in many respects dissimilar, and especially in the matter of allegiance to Rome. The contest between them for the mastery was long and severe; but in the end the younger proved victorious, and the English Church was recognised as one of the federation of Western Churches; but with the spiritual supremacy of the pope as yet unacknowledged, though precedence was yielded to Rome as the elder and mother Church.

The invasion of the Danes was the occasion of a fresh introduction of Paganism into Britain. Christianity, however, had by this time taken such a firm hold of the people, that it was able to offer a vigorous resistance, and successfully beat back the foe. The Anglo-Saxon Church continued to flourish until the time of the Norman Conquest.

Hitherto the ecclesiastical authorities in Britain had maintained their comparative independence of the papacy; but the days of their subjection were now at hand. The advent of the Normans was regarded by the Church of Rome as furnishing a

[1] *History of the Reformation*, Vol. 5.

favourable opportunity for bringing this country more completely under her power. Nor was she disappointed in her cherished expectation. "The clergy, partly of Norman-French, partly of pure Roman descent, to whom the English sees were now transferred, could have no national sympathies with Saxon Christianity. Strangers, they passed into the midst of a strange church. It was natural that they should take up the position of abstract ecclesiastical right. As a general rule, the highest dignities of the English Church fell to Normans, and these priests of the Continent were all supporters of the new hierarchical movement,—of those ideas touching the supremacy of the pope above the Church, and of the Church above the State, of which Hildebrand himself had been the deliberate and most emphatic champion."[1]

The new order of things established at the Conquest soon became an oppressive burden to the English nation. The encroachments and exactions of the Roman pontiff were carried to such an extent, that at length all the bishops were either directly nominated by himself, or, in the case of a disputed election, appointed by his arbitration. The appointment also to inferior benefices, which at first was occasionally sought as a favour, was at last universally claimed as a right. The result was that England was handed over to foreign priests, who drew from the country an immense revenue, and spent it in many cases abroad.

[1] Lechler's *John Wiclif and his English Precursors*, translated by Dr. Lorimer, Vol. I., p. 23.

"Nor was the nomination to church livings the utmost extent to which Rome carried her claim. By what was called a reservation, the pope assumed the power of reserving to himself the next presentation to any benefice he pleased, which was not at the time vacant; or, by another instrument, called a provision, he at once named a person to succeed the present incumbent. In this way, all the benefices in the kingdom, both those that were vacant and those that were not, were turned to account, and were made available in satisfying the herd of clamorous suitors for preferment and dependence on the Holy See."[1]

Thus matters proceeded till the beginning of the thirteenth century. In 1205, Hubert, the primate of England, died. On the very night of his death, the junior canons of Canterbury assembled, and in a clandestine and illegal manner elected Reginald, their sub-prior, to be his successor. The next day, Reginald started for Rome, to seek the pope's confirmation of his election. John, who was then King of England, no sooner heard of this, than he was enraged at the conduct of Reginald and his friends, and at once proceeded to secure the election of the bishop of Norwich to the archiepiscopal see, sending also his agents to plead before the pope.

"The man who then filled the chair of Peter, Innocent III., was vigorously executing the audacious project of Gregory VII., of subordinating the rights and powers of princes to the Papal See, and of taking into his own hands the appointment to all the

[1] *Pictorial History of England.*

episcopal sees of Christendom, that through the bishops and priests, now reduced to an absolute monarchy entirely dependent upon the Vatican, he might govern at his will all the kingdoms of Europe. No pope ever was more successful in this ambitious policy than the man before whom the King of England on the one hand, and the canons of Canterbury on the other, now carried their cause. Innocent annulled both elections,—that of the canons and that of the king, and caused his own nominee, Cardinal Langton, to be chosen to the see of Canterbury. But this was not all. The king had appealed to the pope; and Innocent saw in this a precedent, not to be let slip, for putting in the gift of the pontiff in all time coming, what, after the papal throne, was the most important dignity in the Roman Church."[1]

John saw the danger, and felt the humiliation implied in the step taken by the pope, and protested with many oaths that the papal nominee should never sit in the archiepiscopal chair. Forthwith, he turned the canons of Canterbury out of doors, ordered all the prelates and abbots to leave the kingdom, and defied the pope to do his worst. Innocent accepted the challenge, and, resolved to make the nation suffer as well as the monarch, smote England with an interdict. "The church doors were closed; the lights at the altars were extinguished; the bells ceased to be rung; the crosses and images were taken down and laid on the ground; infants were baptized in the church porch; marriages were celebrated in the

[1] Wylie's *History of Protestantism.*

churchyard; the dead were buried in ditches or in the open fields. No one durst rejoice, or eat flesh, or shave his beard, or pay any decent attention to his person or apparel." The people believed that by this interdict the gates of heaven had been closed against them; and therefore the signs of distress and mourning were visible throughout the land.

The king braved this state of things for two years; but the pope, bent on the accomplishment of his purpose, determined to subdue the monarch. He therefore proceeded to pronounce upon him sentence of excommunication; and to depose him from his throne. At the same time he endeavoured to persuade the King of France to proceed to England with an armed force to carry out the papal sentence; offering him the kingdom of England as a reward. John saw the danger in which he stood, and his heart failed him. Craving an interview with the pope's legate, he promised to submit himself unreservedly to the papal see, and make full restitution to the clergy for the losses they had sustained. Moreover, he resigned England and Ireland to God, to Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and to Pope Innocent, and his successors in the apostolic chair; he agreed to hold these dominions as feudatory of the Church of Rome, by the annual payment of a thousand marks; and he stipulated that if he or his successors should presume to revoke or infringe this charter, they should instantly, except upon admonition they repented of their offence, forfeit all right to their dominions. Thus England became the vassal of Rome.

This dastardly conduct of John aroused the patriotism of the nation. The barons of England resolved that they would never be the slaves of a pope, and vowed to maintain the ancient liberties of the nation, or die in the attempt. On the 15th of June, 1215, they compelled John to sign Magna Charta at Runnymede, and thus in effect to tell Innocent that he revoked his vow of vassalage, and took back the kingdom, which he had laid at his feet. The pope's rage was kindled to the uttermost. He issued a bull, in which he declared that he annulled the charter, and proclaimed its obligations and guarantees void. But his rage was powerless. The bold attitude of the barons saved the independence of the nation.

It was soon found that the movement begun by the nobles for national freedom was accompanied by an awakened spirit of independence on the part of the English Church towards Rome. In 1231, a number of noblemen and priests, united in secret combination, wrote threatening letters to the capitular bodies and abbacies, demanding of them to refuse payment of all imposts to the pope's agents. Nine years after, the cardinal legate Otho was seriously threatened in Oxford, during an insurrection of the students. Other illegal proceedings, indicating a growing spirit of opposition to the papacy, followed in succession. The same spirit manifested itself also through legal methods. In a letter addressed to Gregory IX., in 1246, by the king, the prelates, and the barons of England, complaint was made that the foreigners upon whom livings were bestowed, not only did not

reside in the country, nor understand its language, but even, in their absence and incompetency, appointed no substitutes to perform their duties. In the numerous churches filled by them, it was declared there was neither almsgiving nor hospitality, nor any preaching nor care of souls whatever. In addition to this letter, other protests were from time to time made, either to the papal legates, or to those on whose behalf they acted.

Although the Romish Church was predominant in the land, the people were enveloped in ignorance, and sunk in social degradation and vice. The art of printing was as yet unknown. The Scriptures were a sealed book. The capacity of reading was possessed by only a few. Freedom of conscience was denied. The nation was at the mercy of cunning unprincipled men, who substituted the grossest superstitions for the doctrines and ordinances of Jesus Christ.

Such was the spiritual destitution of the people, that Archbishop Peckham represented them, in a congregation of his clergy, as in a state of deplorable and utter need. "To supply this serious deficiency the primate submitted to the council a list of topics which in future should constitute the matter of regular parochial instruction. This summary includes the decalogue, the fourteen articles of faith, the seven deadly sins, the seven principal virtues, the seven works of mercy, and the usual sacraments. Of the fourteen articles of faith, the first seven relate to the mysteries of the Trinity; the remaining to the person, the sufferings, and the general mediation of the

Saviour. The seven deadly sins include pride, anger, hatred, impiety, covetousness, and intemperance. The seven works of mercy are to compassionate the hungry, the thirsty, and the naked, to bury the friendless, and to aid the sick, the neglected, and the poor. Of the principal virtues, faith, hope, and charity are described as referring to God; while justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence are viewed as relating to men. These epitomes of religious instruction are thus particularly stated, because they are frequently mentioned in the history of the church, through several centuries preceding the Reformation. In the present instance, they were published with explanations, which, if really needed, imply the state of the inferior clergy to have been that of the lowest barbarism. Hence the extent of the improvement proposed by this metropolitan reformer consisted in providing that each clerk should deliver four sermons to his parishioners within a year. These discourses also were to be on some of the themes above described, each of which was so far explained as to demand from the preacher but little more than the mechanical effort of transcription."[1]

In the midst of general ignorance, and the degeneracy of public morals, there arose, however, at intervals men who sighed and strove for a better state of things. Pre-eminent among these was the man whose history we purpose to sketch in this volume. But before entering on that history, we shall briefly glance in the next chapter at three or four of his immediate predecessors.

[1] Quoted in Vaughan's *Life and Opinions of Wycliffe.*

CHAPTER II.

Wycliffe's Immediate Predecessors.

THE first place among Wycliffe's immediate predecessors unquestionably belongs to Robert Grossetête, bishop of Lincoln; a man of such learning, that a contemporary declared that he was in possession of all the sciences. In conjunction with his large and varied attainments, he possessed courage and the fear of God. He was one of those rare men, who so harmoniously combine mastery in learning with mastery in practical life, that they become regal in character and influence. He was born at Stradbroke, in Suffolk, in or about the year 1175; and died in 1253. Although scarcely anything is known of his youth, a remark which once dropped from his lips in after life is worthy of note. A nobleman, having expressed some surprise at his dignified carriage, he replied, that though he was of humble origin, yet from his childhood he had studied the characters of the best men in the Bible, and endeavoured to form himself upon their model.

After completing his studies at Oxford, he received various church preferments. As Chancellor of his University, as Archdeacon of Leicester, and in other offices, he carried out various useful measures; but it was not till his appointment to the see of Lincoln that his character as a reformer fully developed itself.

The diocese was at that time, and remained for centuries afterwards, the largest and most populous in England. Many evils had crept into it, which he resolved to remove. He at once endeavoured to secure a better observance of Sunday and holy festivals, began a personal visitation of the parishes and the religious houses, removed unworthy abbots and priests from office, and insisted on every clergyman's residence in his own parish. He opposed the appointment of abbots and clerics to judicial functions, and laboured with special earnestness to elevate the religious tone of the pastoral office. The course he adopted brought him into collision, not only with many around him, but even with the king, and with the Roman pontiff. But he feared no man, and in his correction of error and immorality, was resolved to execute his duty as in the sight of God.

In his old age he went to Lyons, to present a memorial to the pope, setting forth the corruptions of the church, and exhorting his holiness to purge them away. Though unsuccessful, he again and again renewed his efforts; and in his eightieth year, just before his death, he opposed a scandalous appointment made by the pope himself. Such was the impression he produced on all classes of the community, that fifty years after his death there was a general wish for his canonisation. Though the proposal was unfavourably received at the papal court, and the desire of the English people denied, yet in their estimation Grossetête was a true saint; and for centuries he was known as "Saint Robert."

Among these early reformers was William of Occam, a member and provincial of the Franciscan order, a scholar, a keen and independent thinker, and a copious writer on church matters. He deserves mention for his bold and strenuous opposition to the papacy. He declared it to be a mistaken and dangerous heresy to teach that Christ had endowed the pope with unlimited spiritual and temporal power. If this were so, he said, the gospel had brought with it greater bondage than was experienced under the law. Instead of all power being in the possession of the pope, it would be better to distribute it among several heads. A pope might become heretical. The temporal prince, or any man, had a right to be his judge. A general council chosen by the Church might teach him, control his decisions, and even depose him from his chair. Higher than all these; above the pope, and above the Church itself, stands Christ the Lord. Such was Occam's teaching. As he continued to write, his views of the papal power grew more clear; and he "kindled sparks of evangelical feeling, and struck out new lights of political truth, which proved of use and advantage to succeeding generations, and rendered essential service to progress in the direction of an evangelical renovation of the church."[1]

Richard Fitzralph was in this succession of enlightened and earnest men. Having finished his studies at Oxford, where he distinguished himself as a man of great ability, he was promoted first to the arch-

[1] Lechler, Vol. I., p. 67.

deaconry of Lichfield, then to the chancellorship of his University, and, in 1347, to the archbishopric of Armagh and primacy of Ireland. He was a master of theological science, and an able lecturer and writer. He was filled with the spirit of the Reformation, which had already begun in the church, and did much to promote it. In opposing the Mendicant orders, he contended that their privileges were infringements on the right of the pastoral office;—that the parish church was the place for the parishioner to worship God, and the parish priest, in preference to the Mendicant monk, the person whose ministration should be sought. In consequence of accusations raised against him by his opponents, he carried his contention before Pope Innocent, at Avignon, and defended himself in person. Lechler says of him: "He displays in his sermons much dialectical skill and culture, and a solid and ripe theological condition. But more than all, he is penetrated by a spirit of intense moral earnestness and of true manhood. Richard of Armagh has the spirit of a reformer, in the noblest sense; he is a man who fights against modern degeneracy and ecclesiastical abuses with combined wisdom and zeal; with eye uplifted to Christ, and with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."[1]

One who may be called a contemporary of Wycliffe was Thomas Bradwardine, the "Profound Doctor." Born at the end of the thirteenth century in a small Herefordshire village, on the border of Wales, he

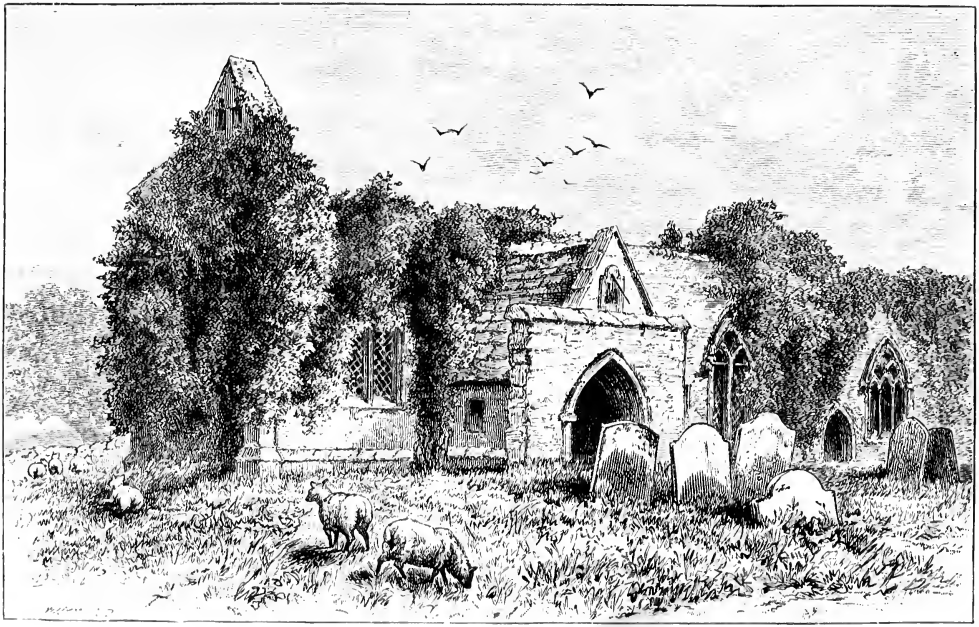
[1] Lechler, Vol. I., p. 84.

went at an early age to Oxford. Here he pursued his studies with such success as to obtain a very wide reputation. As a doctor of theology, he delivered a series of lectures before the University, which largely influenced the theological thoughts of his own and the succeeding age. As chaplain and confessor to Edward III., he served with him in his military campaigns during the long-continued war between England and France; and his influence over Edward and the army was great and highly beneficial. In 1349 he was made Archbishop of Canterbury, but died at Lambeth a few weeks after his consecration. The doctrine which he teaches in his *Cause of God*, which contains his University lectures, is the Pauline doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, to the entire exclusion of human merit. Like Paul, and like Augustine, he became, by the light from heaven which shone upon him in his youth, an extoller and champion of the grace of God, in opposition to the Pelagian and self-righteous spirit which prevailed in his time.

About twelve years after Bradwardine's death appeared the poem known as the *Vision of Piers Plowman*. The author, no doubt, though he evidently wrote for the mass of the English people, was a man of learning and culture. He expresses the feeling of the nation: the hunger and the thirst of men for the gospel of the grace of God. Tradition says that his name was Robert Langland,—that he was a native of Shropshire,—that he was educated at Oxford,—and then admitted a monk in the Bene-

dictine Priory of Great Malvern, Worcestershire. He probably sprang from the agricultural class. It is evident that he understood them, sympathised with them, wrote from their point of view, and for their special benefit. The result was that the poem went straight to their hearts, and continued its hold upon the nation down to the middle of the fifteenth century. It was extensively copied and circulated, largely committed to memory, honoured by many imitations. It belongs to the allegorical order, and consists of a succession of dreams, touching the condition of human society. Among the various characters introduced, that of Piers Plowman comes repeatedly before the reader, and in such a way, that under a thin veil of metaphor, it is possible here and there to recognise Jesus Christ Himself. This character was an especial favourite with the friends of moral and religious reform. The grand purpose of the poem is to recommend practical Christianity, as influenced by a right conception of the love of Christ towards man. The author never assails a single doctrine of the church, but chastises most severely the sins of the priesthood, and complains bitterly of their self-seeking and avarice. The evils prevalent in all classes of society receive sharp castigation; while, on the other hand, the writer sees good wherever it exists, and accords to it generous praise. It has been truly said that though there is undoubtedly something of a democratic spirit pervading the work, yet it is a Christian democracy, like that word of our Lord,—"To the poor the gospel is preached."

There is no doubt that these visions served in a remarkable manner to promote the cause of ecclesiastical reform, and prepare the way for the more enlightened labours of Wycliffe and his coadjutors. "The fourteenth century," says Professor Morley, "yielded no more fervent expression of the purest Christian labour to bring man to God. Langland lays fast hold of all the words of Christ, and reads them into a Divine law of love and duty. He is a Church reformer in the truest sense." "With him," says Dean Milman, "outward observances are but hollow shows, mockeries, hypocrisies, without the inward power of religion. It is not so much in his keen cutting satire on all matters of the church, as his solemn installation of reason and conscience as the guides of the self-directed soul, that he is breaking the yoke of sacerdotal domination. In his constant appeal to the plainest, simplest Scriptural truths, as in themselves the whole of religion, he is a stern reformer."



WYCLIFFE CHURCH.

CHAPTER III.

Wycliffe's Early History.

JOHN DE WYCLIFFE, "the Morning Star of the Reformation," was born in the North Riding of Yorkshire, not far from Barnard Castle. The exact spot of his nativity has been the occasion of some dispute. It seems, however, that it was a small village or hamlet, called Spresswell, close to the river Tees, and about half a mile from the existing village of Wycliffe. Spresswell itself and its old chapel, though both were in existence in the eighteenth century, have passed away, and the site is now a ploughed field. Though probably it should be fixed somewhat earlier, yet according to general tradition the year 1324 has been agreed on as the date of our Reformer's birth.

The Wycliffe family were lords of the manor of Wycliffe and patrons of the rectory, from the time of the Conquest. In agreement with prevailing custom, they took their name from the place of their residence. Representatives of the family continued to live in the Manor-house, which may be still seen situate on a high bank not far from the parish church, until the beginning of the seventh century; when the estate was carried by marriage into the family of the Tonstalls. After the Reformer's death, his family, perhaps as a protest against his career, seem to have

distinguished themselves by their firm attachment to the papacy. Even after the Reformation, they, together with half the population of the village, remained Romanists; and their conduct bears fruit to the present day. The old church on the bank of the Tees belongs to the English Protestant Establishment, while the Roman Catholic inhabitants of Wycliffe worship in their own chapel adjoining the Manor-house.

Nothing is recorded of Wycliffe's boyhood. The country people of the Yorkshire dales are a sturdy race; robust in physical frame, and antique and strong in character. This boy no doubt grew up full of Yorkshire sturdiness and strength. The district of the North Riding is one of fertile valleys and slopes, presenting great and various beauty, and abounding with historic associations. Wycliffe's writings are so full of allusions to his fatherland,—to its scenery and its historical recollections,—that it is evident they largely influenced the formation of his character.

From an early age he was destined for the church. Schools for primary instruction were even then established in connexion with cathedral towns and religious houses in various parts of the kingdom; and many of these schools were conducted with great ability and by men of distinguished attainments. Young Wycliffe may have received his earliest instruction at one of these institutions in his immediate neighbourhood; or it is not improbable that his first teacher was the pastor of his native village. A university education, however, was absolutely necessary for those who contemplated the priesthood.

Cambridge and Oxford were the public schools of England. Oxford especially was in great repute. Monasteries sent up to her their younger monks; students visited her from other countries; her ranks were constantly replenished with the youth of all classes. There was as keen an ambition in those days to send a son to the university, as there is now in Ireland to equip a boy for Maynooth.

It is impossible to fix with certainty the date of Wycliffe's entrance on university life, or to say how long his course as a student continued. We can only be guided by the university usages of that age to a probable conclusion. Assuming, as we do here, that he was born in 1320, he probably went to Oxford about 1335, and pursued his curriculum for ten years. We are left to mere conjecture as to who were his teachers. Some have thought that he attended the lectures of both Bradwardine and Fitzralph. He may have been a hearer of Fitzralph; but it is scarcely possible that he knew Bradwardine.

The studies to which he devoted himself were for the most part such as were commonly pursued at that period. His knowledge of languages seems to have been confined to Latin. As the Greek tongue was seldom taught and little known, it is probable that Oxford supplied no opportunity for its acquisition. He must have devoted much of his time to logic and dialectics, to scholastic philosophy, to canon and civil law, and to the mathematical sciences. His writings abound in illustrations acquired from his reading and studies in these branches of learning.

"At one time it is arithmetic or geometry which must do him service in illustrating certain truths and relations; at another time it is physical and chemical laws, which he applies to illuminate moral and religious truths. And not only in scientific essays is this the case, or only in sermons preached before the university, but even in his English sermons he makes unhesitating use of such illustrations."[1] It is certain that he pursued these studies with such eagerness and success, that he soon obtained for himself a famous and wide reputation,—a reputation that continued to grow with progressive years.

Theology, however, was Wycliffe's chief study. He had given himself to the ministry of the Gospel; and he resolved to be a workman not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. He brought all his studies to bear on the great work to which he had devoted his life. He made himself familiar with the earliest and most distinguished writers of the Christian Church; but he also resorted to the higher fountains of Divine wisdom. The prevailing theology of the day was human. The doctors of theology founded their teaching upon the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. "There was no mention," says Foxe, "nor almost any word spoken of Scripture. Instead of Peter and Paul, men occupied their time in studying Aquinas and Scotus, and the Master of Sentences." But Wycliffe became mighty in a Diviner learning; and, himself taught by the Spirit of God, he became one of the most eminent of Christian teachers.

[1] Lechler, Vol. I., p. 138.

CHAPTER IV.

Wycliffe's Official Life at Oxford.

THE older tradition concerning Wycliffe's residence in the University of Oxford, was that he entered first, in his seventeenth year, Queen's College; that afterwards he was transferred to Merton; and that, after having been made a Fellow of Merton, he was promoted about the year 1360 to the Presidency of Balliol. Later investigations prove, however, beyond any reasonable doubt, that from his first going to Oxford, Wycliffe connected himself with Balliol College, or, as it was then called, Balliol Hall. This college was founded in 1260–82, by the noble family of Balliol, of Barnard Castle. Several circumstances point to a connexion between Balliol and the Wycliffe family, and indicate it as the chosen residence of the Yorkshire youth on his arrival in Oxford.

In 1361 we find Wycliffe Master of Balliol. Yet he could not have held the mastership for any long time prior to this date; for in November, 1356, the office was filled by one Robert, of Derby, who was immediately succeeded by one William, of Kingston. Shortly after he became Master of Balliol, he was nominated by the college to the rectorship of Fillingham, a small parish a few miles north-west of Lincoln; nevertheless, he remained a member of the University, and continued to reside at Oxford. In the episcopal

register of Lincoln there is an entry to the effect, that in 1368 he obtained the consent of his bishop to an absence of two years from his parish church, that he might attend to his Oxford duties. We may infer from this that on previous occasions he had obtained similar leave of non-residence. We know not what provisions he made for his parish during his own absence; but we may safely conclude, from our knowledge of his character and his views of the pastoral office, that he would not suffer his parishioners to be neglected. Perhaps during the University recesses he resided among them, and discharged his ministerial duties in person; while at other times he no doubt provided a curate. We also know that almost immediately after having obtained the dispensation of non-residence to which we have just referred, he exchanged the living of Fillingham for that of Ludgershall in Buckinghamshire, for the sole reason that Ludgershall was nearer to Oxford.

It would seem that in a few years after he became rector of Fillingham he resigned the mastership of Balliol; for we learn from the records of Queen's College, that in 1363, and for several years after, he paid rent for a hired apartment in the buildings of that college; and we find that in 1366 the Master of Balliol was John Hugate.

In December, 1365, Wycliffe was appointed by Simon de Islip, Archbishop of Canterbury, to the office of Warden of Canterbury Hall. This hall had been founded by the archbishop a short time before. Its constitution ordained that its fellowships

should be held by four monks and eight secular priests. The first warden was a monk named Woodhall, who, not being able to govern himself, soon proved his unfitness to govern others. The rivalry existing between the two orders caused contention in the body; constant broils ensued; and finally there came a conflict with the University authorities. Islip's original plan proving unworkable, he sought to remedy the evil by dismissing the four monks, of whom Woodhall was one, and replacing them with seculars. Wycliffe was one of these, and was appointed the new warden. He had been a fellow-student of the archbishop; and received this nomination, not only on account of his learning, but also for his practical fitness and moral worth. He held the wardenship of Canterbury Hall for only a brief period. In the spring of 1366, Archbishop Islip died, and the following year was succeeded in the primacy by Simon Langham, who had been previously a monk, and still favoured the order. Langham immediately displaced Wycliffe from his office; removed him and the other three seculars who had been introduced with him from the hall, and restored Woodhall and his fellow-monks to their former position. Wycliffe and his companions appealed to the pope; but Langham possessed greater influence in that quarter. The final decision, given in 1370, confirmed the expulsion of Wycliffe and his friends, and the re-appointment of their opponents. As an independent foundation, Canterbury Hall no longer exists. After the Reformation, its buildings passed over to Christ Church.

During the years over which we have thus briefly passed, Wycliffe's labours at Oxford were twofold. The first part consisted in practical administration, —as Master of Balliol, and afterwards as Warden of Canterbury. Both these offices required for the faithful and efficient discharge of their duties, high character, sound judgment, firmness and decision, practical sagacity, and kindliness of heart; all of which our Reformer pre-eminently possessed. While attending to his administrative duties, he at the same time gave lectures, and engaged in disputations on philosophical and other subjects,—especially logic and theology. In his theological teaching, his final appeal was to the Word of God. For some ages this authority had been disregarded. The Church forbade any appeal to it. The student of the Sacred Text came under the ban and proscription of the scholastic philosophy. The compilations of men were in higher repute than the teachings of Christ and His apostles. The reader of Peter Lombard might assure himself of a willing audience, while the expounder of Holy Scripture was treated with indifference or entire rejection. Roger Bacon, writing in the thirteenth century, tells us that, "The graduate who reads or keeps to the text of Scripture is compelled to give way to the reader of the Sentences, who everywhere enjoys honour and precedence. He who reads the Sentences has the choice of his hour, and ample entertainment among the religious orders. He who reads the Bible is destitute of these advantages, and sues, like a mendicant to the reader of the Sentences,

for the use of such hours as it may please him to grant. He who reads the sums of Divinity is everywhere allowed to hold disputations, and is venerated as master; he who only reads the text is not permitted to dispute at all, which is absurd." With this testimony before us, it must be acknowledged, that "the Biblical method of instruction was trampled under foot by the overbearing authority of irrefragable and seraphic doctors. And yet in this state of the public mind it was that Wycliffe ventured to associate the study of the Scriptures with the keenest pursuit of the scholastic metaphysics, and to assign to the Bible the full supremacy which belongs to it, as disclosing to us the Way, the Truth, and the Life."[1] His powers of debate in the scholastic exercises or public disputations were indeed unrivalled; but his proficiency in the science of theology challenges our highest admiration. His Biblical studies and discourse brought that science out of the prison-house, and raised it to a position of honour. They not only proved a blessing to others; they became also a course of self-preparation for the great work of ecclesiastical and religious reform in which Wycliffe spent his after years.

[1] Vaughan's *Life and Opinions of John Wycliffe.*

CHAPTER V.

Wycliffe's First Conflict with the Papacy.

So far we have seen Wycliffe almost exclusively in connection with academic work at Oxford; first as a scholar, and then as a public teacher. He seems seldom to have left the city and its neighbourhood. His visits to Fillingham must have been few and short; and we have already ascertained that he procured a dispensation of non-residence, so that he might prosecute without interruption his University engagements. Up to this period his life was confined within comparatively narrow bounds. All at once he comes forth from his limited labours, to take part in public affairs. He suddenly appears in the arena of national struggle as a patriot and a religious reformer. His conflict now is not with the monks of Canterbury Hall, or with the Primate of England, but with the Pontiff of Rome himself.

We have spoken in a previous chapter of the struggle between Innocent III. and the English nation. "Innocent went to his grave. Feebler men succeeded him in the pontifical chair. The kings of England mounted the throne without taking the oath of fealty to the pope, although they continued to transmit year by year the thousand marks which John had agreed to pay into the papal treasury. At last, in the reign of Edward II., this annual payment was quietly

dropped, and no remonstrance against its discontinuance came from Rome."[1] In the year 1365, however, Urban V. renewed the papal claim, and demanded from Edward III., as feudatory tribute, the annual payment of the thousand marks. The demand was accompanied by an intimation that if the king failed in the payment of this tribute, not only for the future, but also for the arrears of the last thirty-three years, he would have to appear in Rome before his feudal superior, to answer for his conduct. Such an unexpected and insulting demand aroused the ire of the king and of the nation at large.

"During the century which had elapsed since the Great Charter was signed, England's growth in all the elements of greatness had been marvellously rapid. She had fused Norman and Saxon into one people; she had formed her language; she had extended her commerce; she had reformed her laws; she had founded seats of learning which had already become renowned; she had fought great battles and won brilliant victories; her valour was felt and her power feared by the Continental nations; and when this summons to do homage as a vassal of the pope was heard, the nation hardly knew whether to meet it with indignation, or with derision."[1]

It was not to be expected that a bold and daring spirit like that of Edward could ever submit to be the slave of the church and the court of Rome. His conduct, therefore, was such as became the prince of a mighty people and a growing empire. He acted,

[1] Wylie's *History of Protestantism*.

however, with the greatest possible prudence; and instead of taking upon himself the sole responsibility of rejecting the papal demand, he laid the question before his parliament, for its consideration and decision. "He had often enough been obliged, in order to meet the cost of wars, to ask parliament to consent to increased burdens of taxation; and all the more acceptable to him was the opportunity of giving into the hands of the representatives of the country the repudiation of an impost which had been in abeyance for more than a generation. Should parliament adopt this resolution, the crown was covered by the country. But the burden of taxation was not the principal point of view from which the parliament looked at the papal demand, much more than that, the honour and independence of the kingdom was the determining consideration for its representatives."[1]

The parliament, to whose wisdom this important question was referred, assembled in May, 1366. As soon as the king placed before it the pope's letter, and asked what answer should be returned, the estates of the realm required a day for consideration and counsel. On the morrow, prelates, lords, and commons came together. Wycliffe was present on that occasion, whether merely as a spectator, or as actually a member of the parliament, it is difficult to say. We know that six Masters of Arts were summoned to it by royal order; and it is not improbable that Wycliffe was one of that number. Anyhow, the part which he bore in this great national affair was a

[1] Lechler, Vol. I., p. 199.

part of the highest moment. We owe to his pen a treatise on the question of political right, written under circumstances to be presently named, entirely in the sense of the Declaration of Parliament.

In this treatise or tract, Wycliffe has preserved a summary of the speeches delivered in the course of discussion on the pope's letter. The first speaker is a military baron, and thus he opens the debate: "The kingdom of England was of old won by the sword of its nobles, and by that sword has it ever been defended against hostile attacks. My counsel therefore is, let the pope gird on his sword, and come and try to compel payment of this tribute by force. In that case I for one am ready to resist him in defence of our right."—"A tax or a tribute," said the second lord, "may only be paid to a person authorised to receive it. He only is entitled to secular tribute who lawfully exercises secular rule, and is able to give secular protection. The pope is only a minister of the gospel. If he keep within the limits of his spiritual office, we shall obey him; but if he transgress these limits, he must take the consequences. It is incumbent upon us to withstand him in his present demand."—"The pope," said the third lord, "calls himself the servant of the servants of God. He should therefore take no tribute except for services rendered. But where are the services which he renders to this land? Does he not rather drain our treasuries, and often for the benefit of our enemies? We must therefore, as a matter of common prudence, refuse his demand."—"On what grounds," asks another lord, "was this

tribute originally demanded? Was it not for absolving King John, and reinstating him in the right to the crown? But to bestow spiritual benefits for money is sheer simony. Let the lords spiritual and temporal wash their hands of a transaction so disgraceful. But if it be as feudal superior of the kingdom that the pope demands this tribute, on the same principle he may declare the throne vacant, and fill it with whomsoever he pleases. Is it not, then, our duty to resist such principles as these?"—"Let us," said another speaker, "go at once to the root of this matter. King John had no right to give away the kingdom of England without the consent of the nation. He never received that consent. The golden seal of the king, and the seals of the few nobles whom he persuaded or coerced to join him in the transaction, did not constitute the national consent. They had no warrant to act in the absence of the authority of the kingdom, and of the full number of consenting votes. We, the people of England, had no voice in the matter; and we hold the bargain null and void from the beginning."

There were other speakers in the same strain. Not a voice was raised in support of Urban's arrogant demand. The decision at which the parliament arrived was unanimous, and was an embodiment in brief compass of both the argument and spirit of the speeches which preceded it. It was not often in those days that such a reply as that of the English nation was given to the pope of Rome. "Forasmuch," such was the decision, "as neither King John, nor any

other king, could bring his realm and kingdom into such thraldom and subjection but by common consent of parliament, the which was not given; therefore, that which he did was against his oath at his coronation, besides many other causes. If, therefore, the pope should attempt anything against the king by process, or other matters in deed, the king with all his subjects, should with all their force and power resist the same." The firm attitude thus assumed by the English nation effectually extinguished the hopes of the Vatican, and freed England ever after of all such insolent demands.

Here we have the foreshadowing of the Reformation. To this result Wycliffe had already, by his lectures and disputations, largely contributed. The doctrines he had propounded had done much to promote the existent state of feeling, and to prepare the nation for taking so bold a step. His influence in immediate connection with the present decision is attested by the following circumstance. Although the pope was not able to find a supporter in parliament, yet he found one outside. A doctor of theology, belonging to the monastic order, whose name has not descended to us, came forward to advocate the justice of Urban's claim. This man laid down the fundamental proposition that the pope as vicar of Christ is the feudal superior of monarchs, and the lord paramount of their kingdoms. From this proposition he argued that all sovereigns owe the pope obedience and tribute; that, in an especial manner, the English monarch was the vassal of the pope, in consequence

of the surrender of the kingdom by John; that, by the non-payment of the annual tribute, Edward had forfeited his throne; and that all ecclesiastics were exempt from the civil jurisdiction, and under no obligation to render obedience. The character of Wycliffe's previous teaching, and the extent of its influence upon the nation, are both evident from the fact that this monk singled him out by name, and challenged him to disprove these propositions.

Our Reformer immediately accepted the challenge. In opening his reply, he styles himself, "the king's peculiar clerk." "But inasmuch," he says, "as I am the king's peculiar clerk, I the more willingly undertake the office of defending and counselling that the king exercises his just rule in the realm of England, when he refuses tribute to the Roman pontiff." It has been generally thought, from the expression *peculiaris regis clericus*, that the king, attracted by his learning and ability, had conferred on him the office of royal chaplain. Lechler imagines that he finds here some support for his theory that Edward had summoned Wycliffe to parliament. It is evident from the phrase, whatever may be its exact meaning, that he sustained some special relation to the king.

We are struck with the moderation, as well as with the ability, which he displayed in this controversy. "If his courage was shown in not declining the battle, his prudence and wisdom were equally conspicuous in the manner in which he conducted it." He places parliament in front, and covers himself with the shield of its authority. It was the affair of the king and of

the nation, and not his merely; and with masterly tactics he so puts it, that instead of appearing a contemptible quarrel between an unknown monk and an Oxford doctor, it stands out as a great controversy between the king of England, and the pontiff of Rome. His tract is for the most part a record of the speeches of the several lords in parliament against the pope's demand,—extracts from some of which we have just given. In addition to the report of these speeches, he furnishes a brief statement of his own objections to the temporal power of the pope being exercised in England. He maintains:

1. That the sovereign is the supreme head of the state in things civil and ecclesiastical, and therefore has the right, in connexion with the parliament, not only to deny the tribute claimed, but even to alienate the property of the church. This doctrine he affirmed to be in conformity with law and the ancient practice of the realm.

2. That if in certain aspects this doctrine was at variance with ecclesiastical canons, it was yet in accordance with the claims of natural right, the maxims of civil law, and the teachings of the Book of God.

3. That as first and "chief in the following of Christ," who had not where to lay His head, the pope's influence should be limited to his spiritual functions, and all civil homage denied him; that the influence of the pontiff and his cardinals had rather been to the detriment of the nation's religious life and privileges; that the conditions on which John first granted the disputed tribute were never agreed to by the people; that if it was paid for the benefit of

personal absolution, or for the removal of the interdict laid upon his kingdom, it involved the head of the church in the sin of simony; that if the pontifical claim were not founded on the fact of spiritual benefit conferred, the despotism now imposed on the church might come in the course of time to press with equal force on the state, and the crown itself be looked upon as at the disposal of the Roman see; that if the property was ever the fair possession of his holiness, the goods of the church could not be lawfully disposed of without an adequate compensation; and surely the rich and broad lands of England were not to be given up for the paltry annual rent of seven hundred marks; that if the pope could thus far alienate the property of the church, he might dispose of it entirely; that if there is to be any superior lord or sovereign above the monarch, he must be no other than Christ Himself; that the pope is a man, liable like other men to sin, and while in mortal sin, is, according to the doctrine of the divines, unfitted for dominion; that the stipulation of the late king could never be held as valid or binding; that never having been made by the kingdom, the kingdom could never descend to recognize it; that the agreement obtained the sanction of only the monarch and a few of his apostate nobles, and that it was injustice to punish their sins on the liberties and the possessions of their posterity.

Such was the ground taken and successfully maintained by our Reformer. The result of this controversy was a great and lasting victory over the Vatican, the blessings of which England enjoys to the present hour.

CHAPTER VI.

Wycliffe as Commissioner at Bruges.

WE must now pass over in silence an interval of a few years, during which the relationships of England with other nations, especially France, were in a disturbed state. The English rule over a large part of France was broken into fragments; and although there had been great sacrifices of money and life, and at an earlier period much success and martial glory, yet ultimately the tide of fortune turned against this country.

In the season of Lent, 1371, a parliament met, before which Edward laid a demand for a subsidy of fifty thousand marks, to carry on the war. Out of this demand there arose a series of warm debates. A motion was made, and, after earnest opposition on the part of the representatives of the Church, carried, that the Church, including its clergy, monasteries, and various foundations, should furnish a substantial share of this war tax. Charges were laid upon them for all estates which had come into their possession by mortmain for the last hundred years, and even the smallest benefices were subject to the levy.

The feeling of the nation in relation to the encroachments of the papacy was still further manifest in the fact, that in connexion with the imposition of this war tax, a proposition was made by parliament

to the crown, that the king should remove all prelates from the high offices of state, and fill up the vacancies with laymen. Edward accepted the proposal; and consequently in February, 1372, we find none but laymen constituting the Privy Council. In the creation of the feeling, which brought about this great and beneficial change, Wycliffe was one of the most important factors.

The Reformer was now getting into the heat of ecclesiastical strife. Two famous enactments, known as the statutes of *provisors* and *præmunire*, had been passed, the first in 1350, and the second three years after, with a view of checking the papal usurpations. By the first of these statutes, it was declared illegal to procure presentation to any benefice from the pope, or to accept any, otherwise than as the law directed, through the chapters and ordinary electors. All other appointments were to be void; and the parties concerned in them were to be punished with fine and imprisonment; all appeal was prohibited beyond the court of the sovereign. The second statute, which was intended to fortify the first, forbade all appeals on questions of property from the English tribunals to the papal court, under pain of confiscation of goods, and imprisonment during the king's pleasure.

In spite of these enactments, there were certain English benefices which the pope kept under his own power. As a rule, these were the wealthier livings. Instead of waiting till a vacancy actually occurred, he issued appointments beforehand. Thus the rights of chapter, or the crown, or whoever was the legal

patron, were set aside; and the real presentee was compelled either to purchase from the pope the patronage which was his own right, or permit the pope's nominee, often a foreigner, to enjoy the benefice. In this way, Italians, Frenchmen, and other strangers were appointed to the most lucrative livings; "some of them mere boys, and not only ignorant of the English language, but even of Latin, and who never so much as saw their churches, but committed the care of them to those they could get to serve them the cheapest, and had the revenues of them remitted to them at Rome or elsewhere, by their proctors, to whom they let their tithes."[1]

There was a general feeling that these usurpations of the papacy could no longer be endured. Deep and ominous were the murmurs which came up from the depth of the nation's burdened heart. To silence these murmurs, Edward sent an embassy to the papal court, to convey to Gregory XI., who then filled the papal chair, the impression which his conduct had made, and to put it before him as the claim of the English people, "that the pontiff should desist from the reservation of benefices in the Anglican Church; that the clergy should henceforth freely enjoy their election to episcopal dignities; and that it might be sufficient, in the case of electing a bishop, that his appointment should be confirmed by his metropolitan, as was the ancient custom." So little disposed was the head of the Roman Catholic Church to grant any concession, and so limited was his measure of relief,

[1] Wylie's *History of Protestantism.*

that the parliament, in conformity with a petition laid upon the table of the house, passed a law against the provisions of the pope, in which they declared the election of bishops to be wholly independent of the papal sanction.

In the year 1373, parliament again raised loud complaints, that the rights of patrons were increasingly infringed and rendered useless by papal provisions. A remonstrance was addressed to the king, setting forth the unjust and oppressive nature of these provisions, and the injury they were doing to the royal authority; and praying him to take action concerning them. Edward replied that he had already sent four commissioners to Avignon, where Gregory was residing at the time, to lay the complaints of the English nation before him, and request that for the future he would forbear to meddle with the reservation of benefices. Parliament, however, renewed its complaints and request. A royal commission was therefore issued in 1374, to inquire into the number of ecclesiastical benefices and dignities held in England by foreigners, and to estimate their exact value. Foxe gives a list of these livings, and says that the entire number was so great that "were it all set down, it would fill almost half a quire of paper." In fact, the clergy of England was to a large extent an alien clergy; and the treasure which it drew from the kingdom was enough to impoverish any nation.

Edward was resolved, if possible, to settle this matter once for all with the papal court. He therefore

appointed a new commission, to act in connexion with the conference for peace between England and France, which was sitting at Bruges, and at the head of which on the English side was John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, third son of the king. The commissioners appointed were John Gilbert, Bishop of Bangor; John Wycliffe, Doctor of Theology; Magister John Guter, Dean of Segovia, Doctor of Laws; Simon of Multon; William of Burton, knight; Robert of Belknap; and John of Kensyngton. It is worthy of note, as an evidence of the growing influence of Wycliffe, that his name stands second on the list of these commissioners. Another evidence of his increasing favour at court is seen in the fact, that either while he was still abroad, or immediately after his return home, he was presented by the king to a prebendal stall in the collegiate church of Westbury, in the diocese of Worcester, and shortly afterwards was nominated by the same royal personage to the rectory of Lutterworth, in the county of Leicester, on which appointment he seems to have resigned the living of Ludgershall.

The commission to Bruges, dated July 26, 1374, conveyed to the commissioners full powers to conclude such a treaty with the papal authorities on the points in dispute, as should at once secure the honour of the Church, and uphold the rights of the English throne and realm. The very next day after it was issued, Wycliffe embarked at London for Flanders. He had never before been away from his native land. Bruges was at that time a large and important city, with a

population of two hundred thousand. Its industries were great and varied, its commercial relationships wide, and many of its citizens were men of much wealth. As the conference for the settlement of peace between England and France was sitting there at the time, several persons of political or ecclesiastical importance from various parts were present in the city, with whom no doubt Wycliffe came into contact, not only in the transaction of public business, but also in the way of social intercourse. Upon such a man, with his mental vigour and independence, his patriotism, his doctrinal and ecclesiastical opinions, this sojourn in Bruges must have made deep and not altogether favourable impressions of the papacy and its friends.

Other important consequences followed Wycliffe's stay in this city. Probably this was not the beginning of his acquaintance with the Duke of Lancaster, and it may be that his appointment on the commission was owing in part to the duke's suggestion and influence; but their association in the present business must have brought them into nearer relations with each other. A few years later we see the duke acting publicly as the Reformer's patron and protector; a course of conduct which may be regarded as the result of personal knowledge and esteem increased by their intercourse at Bruges. The negotiation dragged on slowly with the papal nuncios. On September 1, 1375, Gregory sent six bulls to Edward, as the result of the conference. Substantially they left things much as they were before the appointment of the

commission. Whosoever was in actual possession of a church living in England should no longer have his right of incumbency challenged by the pope; whoever had his right to a living disputed by the pope should no longer have his confirmation in it reserved; benefices already reserved by the pope, if not actually vacant, should when they became vacant be filled up by the patrons themselves. All first-fruits remaining unpaid should be forthwith forwarded. The church revenues of several cardinals who held prebends in England were to be taxed to cover the restoration of ecclesiastical edifices belonging thereto, which the holders had allowed to fall into ruin. The pope abandoned for the future the reservation of church livings; but the king was also bound to abstain from conferring them by simple royal command. This arrangement left the power of the pope over English benefices at least equal to that of the sovereign. That this compromise did not go farther in the direction of reform was no doubt largely owing to the influence of the Bishop of Bangor, who was at the head of the commission. It is a significant fact that immediately on his return home he was translated to the see of Hereford, and some years after, to that of St. David's. In both instances, his promotion was the result of papal provisors, and looked like a reward for services rendered.

The fruits of the conference satisfied no one in England. The conclusion arrived at was seen to be a hollow truce that could not last; nor, indeed, did it, for hardly had the commissioners returned home,

when Gregory began to make as free with English benefices and their revenues, as though he had never tied his hands by promise or treaty. It was not, we may be sure, the fault of Wycliffe that the conference was not productive of greater good. Immediately on its close, in September, 1375, he returned to England, not only dissatisfied, but with his mind more than ever impressed with the corruptions of the Church. What he saw and learned at Bruges he turned to the most practical account. His soul was filled, as it were, with a fresher and a purer inspiration, and he was more than ever resolved to prosecute the work to which he believed God had called him. Henceforth, pope, prelate, and friar came under his severest castigation.

When parliament assembled in April, 1376, several of the members re-stated the grievances of the country in relation to the papal demands and encroachments. In a long and important memorial the parliament set forth its grievances to the king, and prayed that measures might be adopted for redress. The king's answer was cool and disheartening. It was to the effect that there had been sufficient legislation already to remedy the evils complained of, and that his majesty was in actual communication with the pope, and would continue the correspondence until the evils were removed. Though the royal answer was not of a character to sustain the patriotic zeal of the nation, yet the nation renewed its complaints.

In 1377, Edward III. died, and was succeeded by his grandson, Richard II. "The country was still

involved in a war, the expenses of which, together with a want of economy in the administration, had entirely exhausted the royal treasury, and in the same proportion had so ruffled the public temper, that the murmurs of the people daily became deeper and more emphatic. All parties felt that something must be done to relieve the country in its extremity, and at the same time to repress the risings of popular discontent. The source of the evil was traced to the luxury, extravagance, and malpractices of the leading members of the hierarchy. The pope was held guilty of enriching himself by the reversion of benefices; of accepting bribes for the promotion of unlearned and unworthy men to the cure of souls, who never saw nor cared to see the flocks; of levying a subsidy from the whole English clergy for the ransom of Frenchmen as the avowed enemies of the king; of making a gain by the translation of bishops and other dignitaries within the realm; and of appropriating to himself the first-fruits of all benefices. Lay patrons, taking advantage of the simony and covetousness of the pope, were accused of selling their benefices. The pope's collector and receiver of his pence not only kept a house in London, with clerks and officers thereunto belonging, as if it had been one of the king's solemn courts, but annually transported to the papal see twenty or more thousand marks. Cardinals, and other aliens retained at the court of Rome, were raised to the highest offices and dignities within the realm. On these grounds, it was represented to parliament that it would be good to renew all the

statutes against provisions from Rome, since the pope reserved all the benefices of the world for his own proper gift, and had within one single year created twelve new cardinals, thus raising the number to thirty; while all of them, with two or three exceptions, were the known enemies of the king. It was further suggested that the provisors of the pope should be most strenuously resisted, and that no papal collector or proctor should remain in England upon peril of life and limb, and that no Englishman, on the like pains, should become such collector or proctor, or remain at the court of Rome."

In these repeated memorials from parliament, we have no doubt the result of Wycliffe's teaching and influence. We may be certain of this, even though we may not subscribe to the theory that he was himself a member of the parliament and took part in its debates.

CHAPTER VII.

Wycliffe's further conflicts with the Papal Power.

BY reason of his ability and learning, his character and patriotism, and the public services he had rendered to the nation, Wycliffe was now held in the highest esteem. The pope and his prelates could not fail to see that he was a man to be feared, and that the sooner he could be silenced the better. Such a man could not expect to pursue the bold course on which he had entered without opposition. The time for that opposition had now come; and a violent storm suddenly burst upon the Reformer's head.

Twice in the course of the year 1377 he was summoned to appear before the spiritual tribunals; in the first instance before Convocation; the second time before several prelates, commissioned by the pope himself. The immediate occasion of his summons before Convocation, and the questions he was required to answer, are alike involved in obscurity; there being no documentary information touching them in existence. We know, however, the course which things took when Wycliffe presented himself for examination and judgment. The instigator of the proceedings was, no doubt, Courtenay, Bishop of London, who, as son of the Earl of Devonshire, united in himself the nobleman and the hierarch, and

represented the coalition of the nobility with the prelacy, against the Duke of Lancaster. The duke, probably considering that political rather than ecclesiastical motives prompted Wycliffe's citation, judged it his duty to afford him his protection; and therefore accompanied him in person to the assembly of the prelates, gathered for the occasion in St. Paul's Cathedral.

D'Aubigné, the historian of the Reformation, thus graphically describes the scene: "On the 19th of February, 1377, an immense crowd, heated with fanaticism, thronged the approaches to the church and filled its aisles, while the citizens favourable to the reform remained concealed in their houses. Wycliffe moved forward, preceded by Lord Percy, Marshal of England, and supported by the Duke of Lancaster, who defended him from purely political motives. He was followed by four bachelors of divinity, his counsel, and passed through the hostile multitude, who looked upon Lancaster as the enemy of their liberties, and upon himself as the enemy of the Church. 'Let not the sight of these bishops make you shrink a hair's breadth in your profession of faith,' said the prince to the doctor,—'they are unlearned; and as for this concourse of people, fear nothing: we are here to defend you.' When the Reformer had crossed the threshold of the cathedral, the crowd within appeared like a solid wall; and, notwithstanding the efforts of the earl-marshal, Wycliffe and Lancaster could not advance. The people swayed to and fro, hands were raised in violence, and loud hootings re-echoed from

the building. At length, Percy made an opening in the dense multitude, and Wycliffe passed on.

"The haughty Courtenay, who had been commissioned by the archbishop to preside over the assembly, watched these strange movements with anxiety, and beheld with displeasure the learned doctor accompanied by the two most powerful men in England. He said nothing to the Duke of Lancaster, who at that time administered the kingdom, but turning towards Percy observed sharply, 'If I had known, my lord, that you claimed to be master in this church I would have taken measures to prevent your entrance.' Lancaster coldly rejoined, 'He shall keep such mastery here, though you say nay.' Percy now turned to Wycliffe, who had remained standing, and said, 'Sit down, and rest yourself.' At this, Courtenay gave way to his anger, and exclaimed in a loud tone, 'He must not sit down; criminals stand before their judges.' Lancaster, indignant that a learned doctor of England should be refused a favour to which his age alone entitled him (for he was between fifty and sixty), made answer to the bishop, 'My lord, you are very arrogant; take care, or I may bring down your pride, and not yours only, but that of all the prelacy in England.' 'Do me all the harm you can,' was Courtenay's haughty reply. The prince rejoined with some emotion, 'You are insolent, my lord. You think, no doubt, you can trust on your family; but your relations will have trouble enough to protect themselves.' To this the bishop nobly replied, 'My confidence is not in my parents nor in any man; but

only in God, in whom I trust, and by whose assistance I will be bold to speak the truth.' Lancaster, who saw hypocrisy only in these words, turned to one of his attendants, and whispered in his ear, but so loud as to be heard by the bystanders, 'I would rather pluck the bishop by the hair of his head out of his chair, than take this at his hands.' Lancaster had hardly uttered these words before the bishop's partizans fell upon him and Percy, and even upon Wycliffe, who alone had remained calm. The two noblemen resisted, their friends and servants defended them, the uproar became extreme, and there was no hope of restoring tranquillity. The two lords escaped with difficulty, and the assembly broke up in great confusion.

"On the following day, the earl-marshal having called upon parliament to apprehend the disturbers of the public peace, the clerical party uniting with the enemies of Lancaster, filled the streets with their clamour; and while the duke and the earl escaped by the Thames, the mob collected before Percy's house, broke down the doors, searched every chamber, and thrust their swords into every dark corner. When they found that he had escaped, the rioters, imagining that he was concealed in Lancaster's palace, rushed to the Savoy, at that time the most magnificent building in the kingdom. They killed a priest who endeavoured to stay them, tore down the ducal arms, and hung them on the gallows like those of a traitor. They would have gone still farther if the bishop had not very opportunely reminded them that they were

in Lent. As for Wycliffe, he was dismissed with an injunction against preaching his doctrines. But this decision of the priests was not ratified by the people of England. Public opinion declared in favour of Wycliffe. 'If he is guilty,' said they, 'why is he not punished? If he is innocent, why is he ordered to be silent? If he is the weakest in power, he is the strongest in truth!'"[1]

The hostility of the prelates against Wycliffe continued; but his political friends and patrons were too powerful for his enemies to carry out their wishes. They determined therefore to appeal to the papal court, and thus invoke the aid of the highest spiritual authority. Possibly, the first movement in this direction had been already made; but the events of the recent convocation constituted a reason for pushing matters to a more speedy decision. Some have thought that the chief movers in this appeal to the pope were the Mendicant orders; all the evidence, however, points to the English bishops, who, as Foxe observes, "collected articles of his, and sent them to Rome." These articles consisted of a number of propositions which the Reformer had propounded, either in public lectures and disputations, or in his published writings. Though nineteen in number, they may be classed under three heads: those concerning rights of property and inheritance; those concerning Church property, and its lawful secularisation in certain circumstances; and those concerning the power of Church discipline and its necessary limits.

[1] *History of the Reformation*, Vol. V.

They were of course condemned; and such was the determination of the spiritual powers to crush their author, that no fewer than five bulls were issued against him on one day. Although these bulls were signed in May, they were not made public until nearly the close of the year. It is not difficult to understand the reasons of this long delay. When they arrived in this country, Edward III., given up by the physicians, was drawing near to death, and on the twenty-first of June breathed his last. The papal instructions addressed to him were therefore useless; and yet the help of the state was necessary to the carrying out of the course desired by Rome. During the next few months, the unsettled state of public affairs prevented any action from being taken. In the month of October, the first parliament of Richard II., Edward's successor, assembled; and there was such a strong feeling of antagonism to Rome expressed, especially in the Commons, that it was thought desirable by Wycliffe's adversaries to postpone all measures against him until parliament was prorogued.

In this parliamentary session, the first and chief business was to provide against the encroachments of the ecclesiastical power, and to lighten those burdens which had been entailed on the nation by a long-continued and disastrous war. Attention was drawn to the systematic draining of the country by the Roman court and foreign Church dignitaries. The question, too, was asked with great earnestness, whether the kingdom of England, in case of need,

and for the purposes of self-defence, was not competent in law to restrain its treasure from being carried abroad, although in express opposition to papal authority, and on the pain of censure or excommunication. As the outcome of these debates, several petitions were presented from the Commons to the king, renewing the complaints against the papal provisions and reservations, and proposing that from the beginning of the ensuing year, 1378, all foreigners, whether monks or seculars, should leave the kingdom, and their lands and properties in England be applied to war purposes.

In the discussion of these subjects Wycliffe took a prominent part. On the question especially of restraining for purposes of self-defence the wealth of the country from being carried abroad, he drew up, by command, an opinion for the young king and his great council. Taking his stand upon the law of nature, the law of conscience, and the law of the gospel, he maintains the lawfulness of such restraint. The following passage is memorable and worthy of record: "Christ, the Head of the Church, whose example should be followed by all Christian priests, lived upon the alms of devout women. He hungered, thirsted, was a stranger, and suffered in many ways, not only in His members, but in Himself. As the apostle testifies, He was made poor for your sakes, that ye through His poverty might be enriched. Accordingly, when the Church was first endowed, whoever among the clergy were then holders of any temporal possessions, held the same in the form of a

perpetual alms. This is evident from histories, and from other writings. Hence Saint Bernard, in his second book to the Pope Eugenius, declares that no secular dominion could be challenged by him on the ground of his office, as the vicar of St. Peter, and writes thus: 'It may, indeed, be claimed by you, in virtue of some other plea, but assuredly by no right or title derived from the apostles; for how could an apostle give unto you that which he did not himself possess? That care over the Church which he really had he gave you; but when did he give you any worldly rule or lordship? Observe what he saith—"Not bearing rule as lords over God's heritage, but yielding yourselves as examples to the flock." And that ye may not think these words spoken in a show of humility, and not in truth, mark the words of our Lord Himself in the gospel: "The kings of the nations have lordships over them, but it shall not be so with you." Here lordly dominion is plainly forbidden to the apostles; and wilt thou venture to usurp the same? If a lord, thine apostleship is lost; if an apostle, thy lordship is no more; for certainly the one or the other must be relinquished. If both are sought, both shall be lost. Or, shouldst thou succeed, then judge thyself to be of that number respecting whom God so greatly complains, saying—"They have reigned, but not through Me; they have become princes, but I have not known them." And if men will keep that which is forbidden, let us hear what is said: "He who is greatest among you shall be made as the least, and he who is the highest shall

be your minister;" and to illustrate this saying, He set a child in the midst of His disciples. This, then, is the true form and institution of the apostolic calling—lordship and rule are forbidden, ministration and service are commanded.' From these words of a blessed man, whom the whole Church hath agreed to honour, it appears that the pope has no right to possess himself of the goods of the Church, as though he were lord of them; but that he is to be, with respect to them, as a minister or servant, and the proctor for the poor. And would to God that the same proud and eager desire of authority and lordship, which is now discovered by this seat of power, were aught else than a declension, preparing the pathway of Antichrist!"

The man who maintained that the pope's temporal supremacy was a gross usurpation,—that all ecclesiastical property is held conditionally or for certain specified purposes, and that it is the duty of the magistrate to confiscate the temporalities of the priest who habitually abuses them,—that no ecclesiastic, however exalted, can either by his benedictions or his anathemas impart either good or evil, except as these are in conformity with the law of Christ,—and that the highest dignitaries, not excepting the supreme pontiff, may be lawfully corrected by their inferiors,—could not fail to be obnoxious to the Romish authorities. No wonder that as soon as parliament was prorogued Wycliffe's enemies thought it high time to carry out the pope's commands. In December, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of

London, who were the papal commissioners, issued a mandate to the Chancellor of Oxford, requesting him to call to his aid learned and orthodox divines, to ascertain whether Wycliffe had set forth the doctrines embodied in the articles condemned at Rome. He was also to cite the Reformer to appear before the papal commissioners or their delegates, in St. Paul's Church, London, there to answer concerning his teaching, and receive judgment.

The state of feeling in Oxford was not altogether favourable to the purpose of Wycliffe's adversaries. Walsingham tells us that those who were then at the head of the University were long undecided as to what course they should pursue. It seemed to them opposed to their dignity, and even to their rights, that they should be compelled to make one of their own corporation a prisoner, and deliver him over to a tribunal with which they had nothing to do. Apart, however, from the formal and legal point of view, sympathy with Wycliffe and esteem for his person were sufficiently strong to awaken opposition to the papal demand. Ultimately, the Reformer appeared before the pope's commissioners. The locality was changed from St. Paul's to the archbishop's palace at Lambeth; and the date postponed to the following year. Without any hesitation, he obeyed the summons which had been sent him, and presented himself before his judges. The Duke of Lancaster, who had, as we have seen, publicly appeared as his defender on a former occasion, was no longer in a position of paramount influence, and was absent. But Wycliffe

had courage enough to stand alone and advocate his own cause. He put in a written answer, in defence of the theses which had been condemned by Rome, explaining their meaning and justifying them one by one; and he intended that this answer should be communicated to the pope himself. The examination did not pass over without disturbance. Sir Henry Clifford was sent by the widowed Princess of Wales, to demand of the commissioners that they should abstain from pronouncing any final judgment. The citizens of London, too, gathered in a crowd around the palace, and, forcing their way into the chapel where the proceedings were being conducted, loudly and menacingly espoused the Reformer's cause. Under the pressure thus brought to bear from royalty on the one hand, and from the people on the other, the commissioners felt themselves powerless to proceed. To save appearances, however, they issued a prohibition against the future teaching of the theses in question, either in lectures or sermons. Contrary to the intentions of Rome, and directly in the teeth of the instructions which had been given to the commissioners, Wycliffe left the tribunal as free as he was prior to his appearance.

For the second time the Reformer was victorious. The first attack he sustained was an independent attempt of the English episcopate; the second proceeded from the pope himself. On the first occasion, a prince of the blood, the Duke of Lancaster, had used his influence to frustrate the design of the prelates. On the second occasion, the University of

Oxford, the mother of the king, and the citizens of London, encircled him with their sympathy. We see from all this, how his influence pervaded all classes of society, and how he was held in the esteem of the nation. Even where his views as a theologian were not accepted, the people honoured and loved him as a patriot. In spite of the prohibition that he should no more teach his condemned doctrines, he continued to declare and spread them as heretofore. He had given no formal promise to obey the prohibition, and resolved to persevere in his own course. Hitherto he had applied himself to questions of a mixed interest, partly ecclesiastical, and partly political. Henceforth we find him standing forward more distinctly in the specific character of a Church Reformer.

CHAPTER VIII.

Wycliffe charged with Heresy and Insurrection.

FOR three whole years after Wycliffe's appearance before the pope's commissioners at Lambeth, he was allowed to continue his work without any serious opposition. On March 27, 1378, Gregory XI. died; and twelve days after, the cardinals, acting under compulsion from the Roman populace, elected the Archbishop of Barri to be his successor. The new pontiff took the title of Urban VI., and entered upon his work with such earnestness, that Wycliffe and others in England cherished the hope of an approaching reform. That hope, however, was doomed to end in disappointment. Several of the cardinals were bent on thwarting Urban's plans, and offered them the most determined opposition. At length, they declared his election null and void, because it had been made under pressure, and called upon him to resign. Upon his refusal, they elected a rival pontiff, who took the name of Clement VII.; and thus the Church was divided between two chiefs. While Italy, England, Germany, Sweden, Poland, and Hungary acknowledged Urban, Clement was recognised by France, Scotland, Savoy, Lorraine, Castile, and Aragon. The schism thus begun lasted for nearly half a century, and, extending throughout the

whole of Western Christendom, was characterized on both sides by ungovernable passion and deeds of blood.

"In earlier centuries, the schism created in the Church by the election of rival popes had produced in the minds of men the most profound impressions. The world's faith in the unity and immutability of the Church, its confidence in the sanctity of the pontiff in Rome, had been shaken to pieces. When men beheld the vicegerents of Christ contending with envy and hate for power and honour and dominion, they began to have suspicions that in all the life and efforts of the clergy, there was in like manner nothing else to be found but a striving after higher offices and earthly advantages. It may be readily understood that the effects of a schism like that which had now broken out, were more powerfully felt than those of all previous schisms of the same kind, in proportion to its passionate character and its all-embracing extent. How deeply must a man of Wycliffe's zeal for the honour of God and the well-being of His Church, and who was so acute an observer of all ecclesiastical facts, have been affected by the immense event of this papal schism!"[1]

This rival reign of two popes contributed to open the Reformer's eyes more widely to the evils of the papacy itself. His sympathies were at first with Urban, not only because his election had been regular, and had been carried through with honest intentions, but also because he was a man of truly upright

[1] Lechler, Vol. II., p. 209.

character. But, as the struggle proceeded, he could not avoid seeing the adoption on both sides of any means, however unlawful and wicked, that were likely to secure their ends. The result was that he found himself increasingly repelled from both, and cherished a growing indifference to the success of either.

In proportion as his own views of the papacy became more clear, he set himself to enlighten others. In various publications he presented its evils. His neutrality between the two popes was converted into a renunciation in principle of the popedom ; and from this time forth he continued to teach that the papacy is Antichrist, and its whole institution from the wicked one. He first published his tract on the *Schism of the Popes*, in which he adverts to the division in the hierarchy—to the degeneracy of the clergy, through the accumulation of wealth—to the necessity of a more equal and righteous application of ecclesiastical property—to the superstition which had clothed the priesthood with such mysterious power—to the priestly pretensions, as the assumptions of human weakness or of human folly—to their anathemas as pointless—to confession as not essential—to the power of the keys as not derived from Christ—and to dominion over disembodied or departed spirits as the grossest imposition on the credulity of an over-credulous people. The schism thus created in the body-ecclesiastic became a frequent topic in all his subsequent writings, and even in his pulpit addresses. His aim was to undermine the influence of the priesthood. He believed that Simon Magus never laboured more

in the work of simony than did the priests; and he gave it forth, that "God would no longer suffer the fiend to reign in only one such priest; but, for the sin which they had done, made division among two, so that men, in Christ's name, might the more easily overcome them both." In the supplement to the *Trialogus*, he condemned both popes as Antichrist, and magnified the Lord Christ, the true Head of the Church, in that He had split the usurping head into two. With the change which took place in his views of the papacy, there came also a change in his entire theological position; and his ecclesiastical action grew from that period more decided and energetic.

The doctrine of Transubstantiation, one of the chief supports of the Romish Church, and one of the prime sources of her power and influence, took shape in the ninth century, and was brought into England by the Norman priests at the Conquest. This leading error of popery is thus defined: "By the sacramental words, duly pronounced by the priest, the bread and wine upon the altar are transubstantiated or substantially converted into the true body and blood of Christ; so that after consecration there is not in that venerable sacrament the material bread and wine which before existed, considered in their own substances or natures, but only the species of the same, under which are contained the true body of Christ and His blood, not figuratively, nor tropically, but essentially, substantially, and corporally; so that Christ is verily there in His own proper bodily presence." For a long time this doctrine had occupied

Wycliffe's earnest and devout thought, until at length, in 1380, he came to the conclusion that it was opposed to the teaching of Holy Scripture. He conceded that the words of consecration invest the elements with a venerable and mysterious character; but he maintained that they do not in any sense change their substance, and that the bread and wine are as truly bread and wine after, as before consecration. He published, in the following year, twelve short theses upon the Lord's Supper and against transubstantiation, which he undertook to defend against the world.

These theses, according to the only existing manuscript of them, were the following: "1. The consecrated host which we see on the altar is neither Christ nor any part of Him, but the efficacious sign of Him. 2. No pilgrim upon earth is able to see Christ in the consecrated host with the bodily eye, but by faith. 3. Formerly the faith of the Roman Church was expressed in the Confession of Berengarius —viz., that the bread and wine which continue after the benediction are the consecrated host. 4. The Eucharist, in virtue of the sacramental words, contains both the body and the blood of Christ, truly and really, at every point. 5. Transubstantiation, identification, and impanation,—terms made use of by those who have given names to the signs employed in the Eucharist,—cannot be shown to have any foundation in Scripture. 6. It is contrary to the opinions of the saints to assert that in the true host there is an accident without a subject. 7. The

sacrament of the Eucharist is in its own nature bread or wine, having, by virtue of the sacramental words, the true body and blood of Christ at every point of it. 8. The sacrament of the Eucharist is in a figure the body and blood of Christ, into which the bread and wine are transubstantiated, of which latter the nature remains the same after consecration, although in the contemplation of believers it is thrown into the background. 9. That an accident can exist without a subject is what cannot be proved to be well grounded; but if this is so, God is annihilated, and every article of the Christian faith perishes. 10. Every person or sect is heretical in the extreme which obstinately maintains that the sacrament of the altar is bread of a kind *per se*,—of an infinitely lower and more imperfect kind even than horse's bread. 11. Whosoever shall obstinately maintain that the said sacrament is an accident, a quality, a quantity, or an aggregate of these things, falls into the beforesaid heresy. 12. Wheaten bread, in which alone it is lawful to consecrate, is in its nature infinitely more perfect than bread of bean-flour or of bran, and both of these are in their nature more perfect than an accident."

The publication of these theses caused a great sensation in Oxford. It was considered by the Church authorities that they constituted an assault on the orthodox faith. It was argued that the devout feeling of the people in relation to the sacrament would be materially destroyed, and that if such doctrines were

[1] See the original theses in their quaint Latin, in Vaughan's *John de Wycliffe*, Appendix, p. 560.

allowed to be taught in the university, its honour would suffer. The chancellor therefore summoned an assembly of doctors of theology and laws, for the purpose of ascertaining their opinion of this teaching, and of the course which the university should adopt. The conference expressed its unanimous opinion that the theses were erroneous: and that a decree should be issued, declaring them to be so, and prohibiting them from being taught. A mandate in accordance with this decision was therefore drawn up by the chancellor, and immediately published and transmitted to the Reformer. The officers who conveyed it found him seated in his doctoral chair, in one of the lecture-rooms of the Augustinian monastery, lecturing on the very subject. On hearing the mandate, with its sentence of condemnation, he said to the messengers, "But you ought first to have shown me that I am in error." Receiving as the only reply, that he must submit or take the penalty, he declared that neither the chancellor nor any of his colleagues could alter his convictions, and that he should appeal from the mandate to the king and his parliament.

"Lancaster immediately became alarmed, and hastening to his old friend, begged him, ordered him even, to trouble himself no more about this matter. Attacked on every side, Wycliffe for a time remained silent. Shall he sacrifice the truth to save his reputation,—his repose,—perhaps his life? Shall expediency get the better of faith,—Lancaster prevail over Wycliffe? No; his courage was invincible."

Though he was compelled to maintain silence on this subject in his University lectures, the lack of oral teaching was largely supplied by the labours of his pen. He published a large *Confession* on the subject in Latin, and also a popular tract in English, entitled *The Wicket.* This tract takes its title from Christ's language concerning the strait gate and the narrow way which leadeth unto life. The following is, in brief, its substance: "Christ hath revealed to us that there are two ways, one leading to life, the other leading to death; the former narrow, the latter broad. Let us, therefore, pray to God to strengthen us by His grace in the spiritual life, that we may enter in through the strait gate, and that He would defend us in the hour of temptation. Temptation to depart from God and fall into idolatry is already present, when men declare it to be heresy to speak the Word of God to the people in English, and when they would press upon us, instead of this, a false law and a false faith, viz., the faith in the consecrated host. This is of all faiths the falsest."

The largest part of the tract is occupied with the illustration and proof of this last statement. It closes with an exhortation to earnest prayer, that God may shorten this evil time, and close up the broad way and open up the narrow way, by means of Holy Scripture, so that we may come to the knowledge of God's will, serve Him with filial fear, and find the road to everlasting bliss. One passage may be taken as a specimen of the style and reasoning of the whole. "Since the year of our Lord 1000, all the doctors

have been in error about the sacrament of the altar, —except, perhaps, it may be Berengarius. How canst thou, O priest, who art but a man, make thy Maker? What! the thing that groweth in the fields, —that ear which thou pluckest to-day, shall be God to-morrow! . . . . As you cannot make the works which He made, how shall ye make Him who made the works? Woe to the adulterous generation that believeth the testimony of Innocent rather than of the Gospel."

The action on the part of the Chancellor of the University was followed, the next year, by official proceedings on the part of the primate and other heads of the Church, who not only charged Wycliffe with heresy, but endeavoured to trace to his personal influence and doctrine, and to the conduct and teaching of his followers, the insurrection of the peasantry in 1381. Goaded by the excessive increase of taxation, and the severity of the tax-collectors, large mobs had gathered in Essex and Kent, and in the beginning of June marched upon London. Several of the counties were infected by the movement. In many cases, the houses of the aristocracy were destroyed, and their lands wasted; valuable documents were burnt, and their owners put to death. By the time the multitude had reached London, they constituted a body of a hundred thousand men. Strengthened by the lower orders of the city, they burnt to ashes the splendid palace of the Duke of Lancaster in the Savoy; and, having seized the primate, who was also chancellor of the kingdom, and several other

officers of state, they condemned them to be executed as traitors. The soldiers and citizens, who for the moment were panic-stricken, soon regained their courage; and in a few days the insurrection was quelled, and its leaders, together with hundreds of their misguided followers, punished with death. The alleged confession of John Ball, who was connected with the insurrection, in which he implicates Wycliffe and his friends, is no doubt false. The insurrection was directed against the landed proprietors and privileged classes, with a view of establishing a new order of things, that should ignore all the rights of property, and place the whole population on a basis of perfect equality. This was never either the letter or the spirit of Wycliffe's teaching. He contended against the encroachments of the hierarchy upon the rights of the state and the country, and charged them with the guilt of neglecting their spiritual duties; but he always maintained the prerogatives of the state, the authority of parliament, and the general principles of law and order. The avowed hostility of the insurrectionists to the Duke of Lancaster, who had been for years Wycliffe's patron and protector, renders it unlikely that the leaders of this movement belonged in any sense to the Reformer's party. It must be remembered also, that the insurrectionists regarded with unusual favour the Mendicant orders. When Jack Straw, who was second only to Wat Tyler in the command of the insurrection, was under sentence of death, he said, speaking of their purposes and plans, "We would have ended by taking the life of

the king, and by exterminating out of the earth all landholders, bishops, landed monks, endowed canons, and parish priests. Only the Begging Friars would have remained in the land; and these would have been sufficient to keep up Divine service throughout the whole country." It is scarcely likely that a movement thus partial towards the Mendicant orders originated with Wycliffe, who at the very time was preaching and writing against them with all his might.

CHAPTER IX.

Wycliffe denounces the Mendicant Friars.

THE rise of the Monastic Orders, and their rapid spread over Christendom, are too well known to require any lengthened narration. The reputation of their piety during the early period of their history largely increased the number of their patrons, and swelled the stream of their benefactions. Their vow of poverty, though it forbade their holding any property as individuals, yet permitted them as a corporate body to possess themselves of all the wealth they could acquire. "Lands, houses, hunting-grounds, and forests; the tithings of tolls, of orchards, of fisheries, of kine, and wool, and cloth, formed the dowry of the monastery. The vast and miscellaneous inventory of goods which formed the common property of the fraternity, included everything that was good for food and pleasant to the eye; curious furniture for their apartments, dainty apparel for their persons; the choice treasures of the field, of the tree, and the river for their tables; soft-paced mules by day, and luxurious couches at night. Their head, the abbot, equalled princes in wealth, and surpassed them in pride."

Their increasing wealth produced the greatest corruption of manners. Peter, Abbot of Cluny, one of themselves, but one who condemned their habits,

writes thus: "Our brethren despise God, and having passed all shame, eat flesh all the days of the week, except Friday. They run here and there, and as kites and vultures, fly with great swiftness where the most smoke of the kitchen is, and where they smell the roast and boiled. Those that will not do as the rest they mock, and treat as hypocrites and profane. Beans, cheese, eggs, and even fish itself, can no more please their palates; they only relish the flesh-pots of Egypt. Pieces of boiled and roast pork, good fat veal, otters and hares, the best geese and pullets, and in a word, all sorts of flesh and fowl do now cover the tables of our holy monks. But why do I talk? Those things are grown too common, they are cloyed with them. They must have something more delicate. They would have got for them, kids, harts, boars, and wild bears. One must beat the bushes for them with a great number of hunters; and by the help of birds of prey, they chase the pheasants, and partridges, and ring-doves, for fear these servants of God should perish with hunger."

St. Bernard, writing in the twelfth century, says: "What occasions men who in their lives ought to be examples of humility, by their practice to give instructions and examples of vanity? To pass by many other things, what a proof of humility is it to see a vast retinue of horses, with their equipage, and a confused train of varlets and footmen! May I be thought a liar, if it be not true, that I have seen one single abbot attended by above sixty horse! Who could take these men for the fathers of monks, and

the shepherds of souls? Or who would not be apt to take them rather for the governors of cities and provinces?"

The damage done to the papacy by this state of things was so great, that some remedy was felt to be necessary. Any reformation of the existing orders was considered hopeless; and therefore it was resolved to create new brotherhoods. The order of Franciscans was consequently instituted by Innocent III., in 1215; and Honorius, his successor, established that of the Dominicans three years later. It was intended that these younger brotherhoods should, by their humility, poverty, and Christian zeal, remove to some extent the reproach which had been brought upon the Church, through the wealth, and pride, and luxurious indolence of the elder monks. The newly-created orders spread rapidly and widely. Preaching was one great department of their work; and though, as a rule, they were not distinguished for their learning, yet their enthusiasm kindled them into eloquence, and they were everywhere followed by crowds of admiring hearers. They preached in all places,—in the market, at the street corner, or in the church; on week days, as well as on Sundays. In a short time they overran England.

In the prosecution of their itinerant labours, they forced their way into the foremost ranks of society, and into the centre of every circle; and though they bore the name and clothed themselves in the attire of friars mendicant, they yet lived luxuriously, revelled in indulgence, and drained the poorest of the people for their own personal aggrandizement. Even the illustrious Grossetête, who had not only extended to

them his patronage and support, but lavished on them his favour, was so impressed with their rapacity, pride, and ambition,—with their restless and turbulent spirit, as it manifested itself in various parts of the kingdom, that he denounced them as the heaviest curse of the Church, and the greatest obstacle to the cause of Christian truth. Matthew Paris says: "It is matter of melancholy presage, that within the four-and-twenty years of their establishment in England, these friars have piled up their mansions to a royal altitude. Impudently transgressing the bounds of poverty, the very basis of their profession, they fulfil to the letter the ancient prophecies of Hildegarra, and exhibit inestimable treasures within their spacious edifices and lofty walls. They beset the dying bed of the noble and the wealthy, in order to extort secret bequests from the fears of guilt or superstition. No one now has any hope for salvation but through the ministry of the *preachers* or the *Minorites*. They are found at the court, in the character of councillors, and chamberlains, and treasurers, and negotiators of marriage. As the agents of papal extortion, they are incessantly applying the arts of flattery, the stings of rebuke, or the terrors of confession."

They enjoyed from the pope the right of hearing confession and granting absolution; and they exercised this right on such easy terms, that evil-doers of every kind flocked to them for pardon. As the result, there was a frightful increase of immorality and crime. Fitzralph, the Primate of Ireland, writing of them in his day, declares: "I have in my diocese of Armagh about two thousand persons, who stand condemned

by the censures of the Church denounced every year against murderers, thieves, and such like malefactors, of all which number scarce fourteen have applied to me or to my clergy for absolution; yet they all receive the sacraments as others do because they are absolved, or pretend to be absolved by friars."

Wycliffe's earlier biographers regarded it as an established fact that his attack on the friars began as early as 1360; in fact, at the very outset of his public career. Subsequent investigations, however, go to show that he did not enter upon this conflict till at least twenty years later. His earlier assaults were directed rather against the endowed orders of the elder monks. Lechler, who has investigated this question thoroughly in the light of Wycliffe's extant writings, expresses his judgment in the following terms: "As matter of fact, there is no truth in the tradition that Wycliffe from the very first was in conflict especially with the Medicant orders. On the contrary, I find in his earlier writings evidence to show that to a certain extent he regarded them with moral esteem and sympathy. In the same writings, on the other hand, there is not wanting some polemic against the endowed orders. At a later period, say from the year 1378, he began to attack the former also in part; and finally, from 1381, he carried on against them a war of fundamental principle."[1]

It was in 1380 that the Reformer published his tract entitled, *Objections to Friars*. In this treatise, he assails them as the pests of society, the enemies of religion, the patrons and promoters of every crime.

[1] Lechler, Vol. II., pp. 141, 142.

He arranged his objections under fifty distinct heads or chapters, and charges his opponents with fifty heresies and errors, and many more, he says, if men will seek them well out. In the course of his argument, we find the following statements: "There cometh no pardon but of God. The worst abuses of these friars consist in their pretended confessions, by means of which they affect, with numberless artifices of blasphemy, to purify those whom they confess, and make them clean from all pollution in the eyes of God, setting aside the commandments and satisfaction of our Lord. There is no greater heresy than for a man to believe that he is absolved from his sins if he give money, or if a priest lay his hand on his head, and say that he absolveth thee; for thou must be sorrowful in thy heart, and make amends to God, else God absolveth thee not. Many think if they give a penny to a pardoner, they shall be forgiven the breaking of all the commandments of God, and therefore they take no heed how they keep them. But I say this for certain, though thou have priests and friars to sing for thee, and though thou, each day, hear many masses, and found churches and colleges, and go on pilgrimages all thy life, and give all thy goods to pardoners, this will not bring thy soul to heaven. May God of His endless mercy destroy the pride, covetousness, hypocrisy, and heresy of this feigned pardoning, and make men busy to keep His commandments, and to set fully their trust in Jesus Christ." Towards the conclusion of his tract, he says, "The friars being cause, beginning, and maintaining of perturbation in Christendom, and of all evil of this

world, these errors shall never be amended till friars be brought to freedom of the gospel, and clean religion of Jesus Christ."

Wycliffe's opposition both to monks and friars increased with increasing years. Even in his hours of sickness he could not suffer them to escape. In 1379, the year before the appearance of his *Objections*, he fell dangerously ill at Oxford. "Great," says D'Aubigné, "was the joy in the monasteries; but for that joy to be complete, the *heretic* must recant. Every effort was made to bring this about in his last moments. The four regents, who represented the four religious orders, accompanied by four aldermen, hastened to the bedside of the dying man, hoping to frighten him by threatening him with the vengeance of heaven. They found him calm and serene. 'You have death on your lips,' said they; 'be touched by your faults, and retract in our presence all that you have said to our injury.' Wycliffe remained silent, and the monks flattered themselves with an easy victory. But the nearer the Reformer approached eternity, the greater was his horror of monkery. The consolation he had found in Jesus Christ had given him fresh energy. He begged his servant to raise him on his couch. Then, feeble and pale, and scarcely able to support himself, he turned towards the friars, who were waiting for his recantation, and opening his livid lips, and fixing on them a piercing look, he said with emphasis, 'I shall not die, but live; and again declare the evil deeds of the friars.'"[1]

[1] *History of the Reformation*, Vol. v.

WYCLIFFE AND THE FRIARS.

CHAPTER X.

Wycliffe and his Party suffer continued Persecution.

It was an unfortunate thing for Wycliffe that immediately after the insurrection of Wat Tyler and his followers, Courtenay, Bishop of London, was made Primate, in the room of Sudbury, who had been beheaded in the Tower by the insurgent mob. Courtenay was a zealous supporter of the papacy, and one of Wycliffe's most determined foes. In 1377, he had, as we have seen already, instituted proceedings against him. Since that, the Reformer had become more bold, and in various ways his influence had spread and strengthened. The Primate inclined to the view that Wycliffe, in an indirect way at least, was concerned in the insurrection; and on this ground, as well as on account of his theological teaching, he considered it an imperative and immediate duty to summon him to answer for his doctrines, with a view to their condemnation. He accordingly convened an assembly of sixty ecclesiastical dignitaries,—men of known orthodoxy, who could be trusted for their fidelity to the papacy, to examine and pronounce judgment on the questions to be laid before them.

This conference was held in the hall of the Dominican monastery, Blackfriars, London, on May 17, 1382. Its members had just taken their seats

and were proceeding to business, when a dreadful earthquake, which shook the city of London and all Britain, made the building tremble, and so alarmed those present, that they looked upon it as a sign of Divine displeasure, and counselled the abandonment of the inquiry. The Primate, however, who was not a man to be easily turned from his purpose, endeavoured to calm their minds by declaring that this earthquake was an emblem of the purification of the kingdom from error; and therefore, instead of being feared, was to be regarded as a favourable omen. "Know you not," said he, "that the noxious vapours which catch fire in the bosom of the earth, and give rise to these phenomena which alarm you, lose all their force when they burst forth? Well, in like manner, by rejecting the wicked from our community, we shall put an end to the convulsions of the Church." The assembled prelates regained their courage; and one of the archbishop's officers read ten propositions, said to be Wycliffe's, but ascribing to him certain errors of which he was quite innocent.

Although there are no formal records of the transactions of this conference, the conclusions arrived at are contained in the archbishop's mandates afterwards published. From these we learn that the ten propositions were condemned as heretical and erroneous. One of these mandates was addressed to the Primate's commissioner at Oxford; the other to the Bishop of London. Although Wycliffe is not mentioned in either of these by name, nor any of his followers, yet both agree in affirming that men without authority,—

children of perdition, having usurped the office of preachers, and preached heretical doctrines in churches and other places, to the undermining of the peace of the kingdom, the archbishop had called into his counsels men of learning and experience, by whom these doctrines had been carefully examined, and altogether condemned. The Oxford mandate directs the Primate's commissioner there to publish a prohibition, that henceforth no man shall be permitted to teach the condemned doctrines in lectures, or to preach or defend them in the University. The mandate sent to the Bishop of London enjoins him to communicate to all his brother prelates in the province of Canterbury the Primate's injunction, that no one shall in future preach, teach, or hold these doctrines in any part of their jurisdiction. All cases of disobedience were to be followed by excommunication. A fierce and fiery persecution was now commenced against the Reformer and his followers. They were represented as teaching that the Bishop of Rome had no legislative authority in the Christian Church,—that the pomp and dignity of the higher orders of the priesthood should be done away,—that the clergy should have no power, either to farm, or to live away from their benefices,—that auricular confession is superfluous,—that the power of granting indulgences, or of binding and loosing, is a delusion, —that the worship of images is idolatry, and that the miracles attributed to them are a deception.

It was necessary now to obtain the sanction and help of the State, so that those who advocated these

heretical opinions, or professed their faith in them, should be compelled to recant; or, if they proved refractory, should be crushed by law. The archbishop, therefore, immediately moved in parliament that the Chancellor of the kingdom should issue orders to sheriffs and other officials to imprison all such preachers, together with their patrons and followers, as the prelates should indicate by name. "He represented to the House of Lords, that it was a well-known fact that different ill-disposed persons were going through the realm, from county to county, and from town to town, in a well-known dress, and under the aspect of great holiness, were preaching from day to day, without authority from the proper ordinary, or credentials from any other quarter, not only in churches and churchyards, but also in market-places and other public thoroughfares, where much people are wont to resort. Their sermons were full of heresies and manifest errors, to the great injury of the faith and the Church, and to the great spiritual peril of the people and of the whole realm. These men preach also things of a calumnious kind, in order to sow strife and division between different classes, both spiritual and secular, and they influence the minds of the people to the great danger of the whole kingdom. If these preachers are summoned by the bishops for examination, they pay no regard to their commands, do not trouble themselves in the least about their admonitions, and the censures of the Holy Church, but rather testify their undisguised contempt for them. They know, besides, how to draw

the people by their fine words to listen to their sermons, and they hold them fast in their errors with a strong hand, and by means of imposing crowds. It is, therefore, he urged, indispensably necessary that the State should lend the assistance of its arm to bring to punishment these itinerant preachers as a common danger to the country."[1]

The Lords consented to the Primate's motion. It never, however, passed the Commons; indeed, it is uncertain whether it was ever introduced there. Yet, although without the consent of the Commons it could not become law, an ordinance dated May 26, 1382, was placed on the statute-book, embodying substantially its requirements. There were sharp eyes in the nation that soon detected the irregularity, among them were those of Wycliffe himself. Parliament reassembled in November of the same year; and that very month the Reformer addressed a memorial to the Commons, in which he set forth and defended in a summary way his teaching on four points: monastic vows; the exemption of the clergy and Church property; tithes and offerings; the Lord's Supper, and the duty of publicly teaching its true doctrine in the churches. As to the first, he demanded that the monastic orders should be abolished; and that their members should be released from the vows which made them a scandal to the Church and a pest to society. As to the second, he traced the corruption and inefficiency of the clergy largely to their enormous wealth; and, inasmuch as he did not expect

[1] Lechler, Vol. II. pp. 239, 240.

they would surrender their revenues of their own free will, he called for the interference of the State. As to tithes and offerings, he maintained that they should be on a sufficient scale for the support of those who ministered to the spiritual needs of the people; but not so large as to make them proud and luxurious. "I demand," he said, "that the poor inhabitants of our towns and villages be not constrained to furnish a worldly priest, often a vicious man and a heretic, with the means of satisfying his ostentation, his gluttony, and his licentiousness; of buying a showy horse, costly saddles, bridles with tinkling bells, rich garments and soft furs, while they see their wives, children, and neighbours dying of hunger." As to the Lord's Supper, he pleads that all the ministers of Christ may have liberty to teach the true doctrine. This memorial was adapted to find acceptance in the Commons, and no doubt influenced the discussion which took place on the unconstitutional proceedings that had incorporated an ordinance passed only by the Lords among the statutes of the realm. The result was that a petition was presented by the Commons to the king, declaring that they had never given their consent to the statute, and moving that it be annulled. The monarch felt constrained by the unanimity of the petitioners to grant their request.

Courtenay, indignant at this intervention of the Commons, immediately held a provincial synod at Oxford, before which he summoned Wycliffe to appear in person. Some have doubted whether he answered to the summons. The probabilities are that he

responded to it with his usual promptitude and courage. "Forty years ago the Reformer had come up to the University. Oxford had become his home; and now it was turning against him! Weakened by labours, by trials, by that ardent soul which preyed upon his feeble body, he might have refused to appear. But Wycliffe, who never feared the face of man, came before his enemies with a good conscience. We may conjecture that there were among the crowd some disciples who felt their hearts burn at the sight of their master; but no outward sign indicated their emotion. The solemn silence of a court of justice had succeeded the shouts of enthusiastic youths. Yet Wycliffe did not despair. He raised his venerable head, and turned to Courtenay with that confident look which had made the regents of Oxford shrink away. Growing wroth against the *priests of Baal*, he reproached them with disseminating error in order to sell their masses. Then he stopped, and uttered these simple and energetic words: 'The truth shall prevail!' Having thus spoken, he prepared to leave the court. His enemies dared not say a word; and, like his Divine Master at Nazareth, he passed through the midst of them, and no man ventured to stop him."[1] The synod pronounced no sentence; and the Reformer departed to his labours at Lutterworth.

The Primate, however, was not to be thwarted in his purpose. He again appealed to the King. "If," said he, "we permit these heretics to inflame the passions of the people, our destruction is sure.

[1] D'Aubigné, Vol. v. (Book xvii. ch. 8.)

We must silence these Lollards." Richard was frightened by the representations made to him; and in the exercise of the prerogative he possessed as defender of the Catholic faith, he gave the Primate and his suffragans special and full power to imprison the preachers of the condemned doctrines, and to keep them in confinement, until they recanted and gave proof of repentance, or until the pleasure of the king and his privy council should be known.

It was now possible for the Primate to bend or crush both the leaders and followers of this new reform. He was resolved that no time should be lost; and every effort was therefore made to intimidate Wycliffe and his party. Oxford, Lutterworth, and Leicester were the three chief centres of their labours, and were at that time all embraced in the extensive and populous diocese of Lincoln. So earnestly had the bishop of this diocese furthered the persecution of the Wycliffite brotherhood, that he received a letter of commendation and thanks from the Primate for his zeal. In London, too, and the districts around, the Reformer had many followers; and the Bishop of London, like his brother of Lincoln, distinguished himself by his endeavours to extirpate them. In less than six months, Wycliffe's party in the University of Oxford was reduced to silence; while his chief friends in various parts of the country had either submitted to the Church and formally recanted, or they had left the kingdom. Amid these proceedings, and in spite of the desertion of his friends, the Reformer himself stood firm.

CHAPTER XI.

Wycliffe's Last Years and Death.

WYCLIFFE, having returned in peace from the Oxford synod to his parish duties in Lutterworth, continued in his work during the two years which intervened between this period and his death, suffering no further personal opposition from the English hierarchy. These two years were filled up with quiet but varied labours. He devoted himself with conscientious fidelity and unwearied industry to his pastoral work; and no doubt many of his English sermons, still in existence, were prepared and preached at this period. His age and declining strength, however, compelled him to secure, in the person of one John Horn, a kind of assistant pastor. Another of his followers, one John Purvey, was also his constant attendant, his diligent co-worker and confidential friend. Purvey was a man of kindred spirit to his own. To him we are indebted for the writing out and collection and preservation of so many of the Reformer's discourses. Next to Nicholas Hereford, he was the most able and active of his co-workers in the translation of the Bible; and when the revision of that translation was deemed necessary it was he who executed the largest share, and carried the work forward to its completion. "It may also be assumed, with some degree of probability, that

during these years the preaching itinerancy, although menaced by the measures of the bishops, was still carried on, though in diminished proportions and with some degree of caution; and so long as Wycliffe lived, Lutterworth continued to be the centre of this evangelical mission. But the narrower the limits became within which this itinerancy could be worked, the more zealously did Wycliffe apply himself to the task of instructing the people by means of short and simple tracts in the English tongue. The largest number of these tracts which have come down to us belong to this period, and of these there are at least fifty. Setting aside translations of portions of Scripture, these tracts may be divided into two chief groups. The one consists of explanations of single heads of the Catechism; the other of discussions of the doctrines of the Church. The latter for the most part have a polemical character, while the former are in a more positive form didactic and edifying. Some treat of the ten commandments, of works of mercy, of the seven mortal sins; several discuss the duties belonging to the different stations and relations of life, while others treat of prayer, and explain the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*. There are also tracts on the Lord's Supper and on Confession and Absolution. Some defend the itinerant preachers. Others set forth the function of preaching, the nature of pastoral work, and the life and conversation which should characterize the priests."[1]

In 1382, a crusade set forth from England, for the

[1] Lechler, Vol. II. pp. 274, 275.

purpose of fighting for the cause of Urban VI. against the supporters of the rival pope in Avignon, Clement VII. At the instigation of Urban, an agitation was got up throughout the realm, with the view of gaining the largest possible number to take a personal share in the crusade, and of inducing others to aid it, at least with money and money's worth. The Primate threw himself into the agitation with all the influence and energy he possessed. He issued various mandates, ordering prayers for the success of the crusaders, and enjoining collections for the same object. Pardons were offered by papal authority, that were to be of virtue both for the living and the dead. It was reported that one of the commissioners had said, that at their command angels descended from heaven to release souls in purgatory from their pain, and to translate them instantly to heaven. Upon such proceedings as these, Wycliffe could neither look with favour nor preserve silence respecting them. More than once he not only threw gleams of side light upon the crusade, but also discussed it in proper form. In the summer of 1383, he published a small tract in Latin, bearing the title *Cruciata;* or, *Against the War of the Clergy.* In this pamphlet, he condemns the crusade and everything connected with it in the severest manner; first, because it is not a war at all; then, because a war to which the pope is the summoner is, under all circumstances, contrary to the mind of Christ; and further, because the whole quarrel between the contending popes has to do at bottom only with worldly

power and mastery, which is a thing entirely unbefitting the pope and wholly contrary to the example of Christ.

Although these last years were spent without interruption, we have no ground to suppose that the wrath of his enemies had ceased, or even declined. It has been said that one day, while quietly pursuing his work, he received a summons from Urban, to repair to Rome, and answer for his heresies before the papal see; but, that while frankly avowing his firm belief in the doctrines he taught, he declined obedience to the summons, pleading as an excuse his age and many infirmities. Although this statement has been repeated by one writer after another, it seems to have no foundation, except in the mistaken interpretation of one of the Reformer's own writings; a production which has been called a letter from Wycliffe to Urban, but which on careful examination seems to be no letter at all, but only a declaration addressed to English readers. Wycliffe's latest, and in many respects ablest biographer, distinctly affirms that, "this alleged citation to Rome must be relegated to the category of groundless traditions."

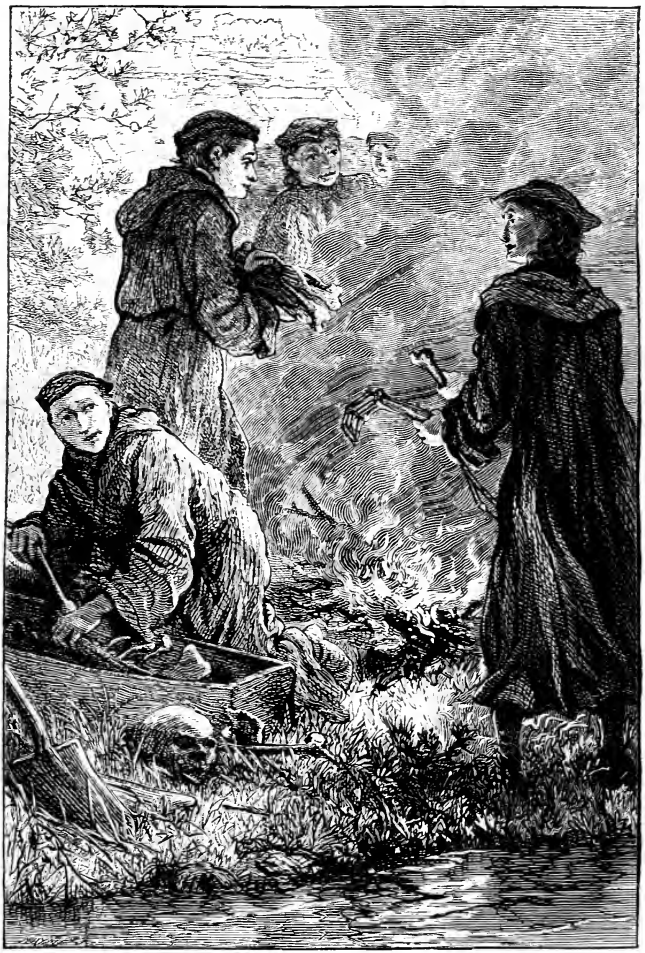
There can be no doubt that the wrath of his enemies still raged, and that they still devised his hurt. He seems to have been fully conscious of this, and was evidently prepared to meet their fiercest assaults, and go even unto prison and to death, for the sake of the truth he held, and the Master whom he loved and served. In the *Trialogus*, one of his most important works, and written during these years, he

speaks more than once on this very subject. "We have no need," he says in one place, "to go among the heathen, in order to die a martyr's death; we have only to preach persistently the law of Christ in the hearing of Cæsar's prelates, and instantly we shall have a flourishing martyrdom, if we hold out in faith and patience." The protecting arm of God, however, was around him; and, for some reason or other, he was left undisturbed. He continued his labours, held in high estimation as a Christian and a minister by his parishioners and the people at large. "His very courage," says one, "in the hand of God was his shield; for while meaner men were apprehended and compelled to recant, Wycliffe, who would burn, but not recant, was left at liberty. The political troubles of England, the rivalry of the two popes, one event after another came to protect the life and prolong the labours of the Reformer; till his work at last attained a unity, a completeness and a grandeur, which the more we contemplate it, appears the more admirable."

Towards the close of 1382, Wycliffe was visited by a stroke of paralysis, which disabled him from continuing those public labours in which he had hitherto engaged. Two years after, on December 28, 1384, while he was hearing mass in his parish church at Lutterworth, at the very moment of the elevation of the host, he had a second paralytic seizure of great violence, and immediately fell to the ground. His tongue in particular was affected by the stroke, so that from that moment he never spoke a single word more, and remained speechless till his death, which

took place on Saturday evening—Sylvester's Day, and the eve of the feast of Christ's Circumcision. A declaration, certifying these circumstances of the Reformer's death, was made in the year 1441, by John Horn, who had been his assistant, to Dr. Gascoigne, chancellor of Oxford University. This declaration Horn confirmed with an oath. We have here a sufficient answer to the calumnious statements of those hostile chroniclers, who affirmed "that Wycliffe was righteously smitten down on St. Thomas's Day, whom he had often blasphemed; and when he had the intention to preach and to allow himself upon a blasphemous attack upon the saint;" and a sufficient answer to all other slanders and falsehoods professing to be descriptive of the Reformer's death. Thus was removed from the Church on earth one of the boldest witnesses of the truth. It was a glorious conclusion to a noble life. "None of its years, scarcely any of its days, were passed unprofitably on the bed of sickness. The moment his great work was finished, that moment the voice spake to him, which said, 'Come up hither!'"

To prove that the wrath of his enemies was as bitter as ever, we give a specimen of the way in which it pursued him even after his death. "On the feast of the passion of St. Thomas of Canterbury," says one of them, "John Wycliffe, that organ of the devil, that enemy of the Church, that author of confusion to the common people, that idol of heretics, that image of hypocrites, that restorer of schism, that storehouse of lies, that sink of flattery,—being smitten by the



THE BURNING OF WYCLIFFE'S BONES.

horrible judgment of God, was struck with palsy, and continued to live in that condition until St. Sylvester's Day, on which he breathed out his malicious spirit into the abodes of darkness." Nor did the wrath of his adversaries stop here. In 1415, more than thirty years after his death, the Council of Constance selected from his writings a number of propositions, which they reprobated and branded with the mark of heresy; consigned his memory to infamy and execration; issued an order that "his body and bones, if they might be discovered and known from the bodies of other faithful people, should be taken from the ground, and thrown away from the burial of any church, according to the canon laws and decrees!"

All nations—even the most rude and barbarous—have held sacred the ashes of the dead. It was reserved for the Church of Rome, in the fourteenth century of Christian love, and in the heart of our own England, to do a deed, which of itself is sufficient to blot the name of the communion by whose command it was done. Thirteen years after the order was pronounced, the grave of Wycliffe was opened and ransacked; what were supposed to be his remains were unceremoniously disinterred, then committed to the flames, and the ashes cast into the adjoining brook—happily, we should say, named the Swift, for, as Thomas Fuller says, "this brook conveyed them into Avon, the Avon into the Severn, the Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean; and thus the ashes of Wycliffe were the emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed all the world over."

CHAPTER XII.

Wycliffe and the Preaching of the Gospel.

WHEN our Lord ascended to heaven, leading captivity captive, and received gifts for men, "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministration, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." A holy and duly qualified ministry is essential to the true health and well-being of the Church. If the pulpit give forth the simple, living utterances of Christianity—if nothing be known there but Christ and Him crucified—if man's state by nature, as a lost and guilty sinner, be faithfully pointed out—if no veil be drawn over the cross to hide its glory—if there be a true exhibition of the one great atonement as the only ground of acceptance with God—it can never be too conspicuous, or hold too high a place in the thoughts and estimation of the people. It was when the altar was raised above the pulpit that the cross became veiled, and the doctrine of the atonement was lost sight of and forgotten amid the manipulations and mock-offerings of the priesthood.

The conversion of our Saxon ancestors is to be ascribed chiefly to the power of preaching; and this power we believe it is which, under the blessing of the Divine Spirit, is to regenerate, set free, and bless all the nations of the earth. In the fourteenth century, the exercises of public worship were little better than a mere mechanical occupation—an unmeaning repetition of the prescribed service of the mass-book. The preaching friars were instituted as an order to supply the lack of oral instruction; but their ministry soon degenerated into cunningly devised fables, and tended to mislead the people on the most momentous of all interests. Impressed with these facts, and with the office of preaching as the most efficient means of quickening men's thoughts, and taking them away from the outward and the ceremonial in religion to that which is inward and spiritual, our Reformer never neglected or undervalued the ministrations of the pulpit. He endeavoured constantly to maintain in full force and efficiency what Edward Irving styles, "The ancient ordinance of preaching."

His sermons that have been preserved are of two classes,—those in Latin, and those in English. The Latin discourses, as might have been supposed, and as is evident from their form and substance, were preached before the University. It is clear from the method of reasoning and the style of illustration,—from the kind of quotations introduced and authorities cited, that the preacher is dealing with professors and scholars. We find too much in the style and method of these university discourses, of what the preacher,

when he comes to lay down rules of preaching for others, unsparingly condemns; but then we must remember the character of his audiences, and the influence of prevailing custom upon a man even of such mental vigour and independence as himself. It should be stated too that even in these sermons the method is often simple, the style clear, and the whole matter pervaded throughout by a devout and fervid spirit. His English discourses are remarkable productions. They are free from the phraseology of the schools, lucid in thought, plain in language, fresh and vitalizing in their power. They are partly such as we may suppose he preached to his congregation at Lutterworth, and to assemblies of the common people elsewhere, and partly, as it seems, outlines of discourses for the use, either direct or indirect, of the itinerant preachers whom he sent forth.

As to the substance of his preaching, especially in later years, it is not the word of man, but the word of God. He connects largely one portion of Scripture with another; endeavours to show the harmony of the several parts; makes Scripture interpret itself; and points out how all the successive revelations in their unity constitute the declared will of God to man. He tries all doctrine, and ecclesiastical polity and discipline, by Divine Truth; and makes it his great business to expound and maintain the supreme authority of that truth, as a rule of faith and practice. He introduces many subjects which some people would scarcely consider within the range of gospel teaching, and in the discussion of which it might be

thought that he violates his own rule,—not to preach anything save the Word of God. But it must be remembered, that the authority and powers of the Papacy, the landed endowments of the Church, monkery and the Mendicant orders, and other questions of which he treats, were all immediately connected with the state of religion in his day; and that he judges them all according to their agreement or otherwise with the teaching of Scripture and the state of the primitive Church. It has been objected to his sermons, that they are not sufficiently evangelical; that they do not set forth in explicit terms the plan of human salvation; and that they are especially wanting in clear teaching concerning the doctrine of the atonement of Jesus Christ, and its correlative doctrine of justification through faith. If we confine our attention to his earlier discourses, there may be some ground for the objection. But we must remember that, like all other reformers, Wycliffe had to grope his way out of darkness into light; and there is sufficient evidence in what remains of his ministry to assure us that his path became clearer and clearer even unto the perfect day. Though he loses no opportunity of rebuking the vices of the age, and of exposing the corruptions of the Church, he gives increasing prominence to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, especially to the atonement of Christ and the work of the Spirit of God.

His sermons abound in illustrations drawn from the various sciences, from history, from nature, and every-day life. Sometimes they are pervaded by a

rich vein of wit and humour. Speaking in one place of the way in which a learned opponent evaded his arguments without answering them, he says,—"Verily that is not the way to untie knots, for so might a magpie contradict all and every proof. He sillily leaves the question in this form unanswered, and introduces quite a different subject; like the woman who, when asked, 'How far is it to Lincoln?' gave for answer, 'A bag full of plums.'" Occasionally he treats his adversaries with sarcastic mockery, as when speaking of the begging friars, he says, "They are like the tortoises, which quickly find their way, one close after the other, through the whole country. They penetrate every house, into the most secret chambers, like the lapdogs of women of rank." As to his style, Lechler says that the structure of his sentences is loose, that his repetitions are numerous, and that his diction rarely sits close to the thought, or displays careful choice; but that in compensation for these defects, he "always communicates *himself* as he is, his whole personality, true and full. As a preacher, as well as a writer, he is always the whole man. There is a force and fulness of character in his language, which makes an over-mastering impression, and keeps the mind enchained. This arises from the fact that his convictions have a moral source —that having reached his conclusions more in a moral than a merely intellectual way, his utterances have equally the stamp of decisive thinking and of energetic moral earnestness. As a preacher, in particular, Wycliffe at all times proves himself a man of perfect

integrity, and at every stage of his inner development reflects it faithfully as in a mirror."

The preaching in the University and elsewhere must have exerted a wide and powerful influence. In course of time, he became an occasional preacher in the pulpits of London, and there is evidence to show that he spoke out as boldly in the churches of the metropolis as he had done for many years in his discourses at Oxford; and that he gained the attention of the public, and made converts, both among the highest nobles of the land and the masses of the common people. During the last years of his life, when he was excluded from the University, his ministry among his parishioners at Lutterworth must have largely conduced to their spiritual profit; while through various channels it acted with vital force on the minds of thousands scattered over the length and breadth of the land.

We have no direct means of knowing much of Wycliffe's manner of life as a parish priest. Chaucer, in his *Canterbury Tales*, presents us with a beautiful portrait of a faithful Christian teacher and pastor; and it has been thought by some that the original of the portrait was our Reformer. Be that as it may, we know that his labours were not confined to the pulpit. Domiciliary visits entered largely into his plan and execution of parochial duty. He was a man of deep sympathies. The cause of the poor and the afflicted lay near his heart; and to relieve the one or comfort the other yielded him high satisfaction. He was familiar with the home of poverty and the house

of mourning. He shed the light and the lustre of his piety over every scene. Difficult as it is sometimes to deal faithfully with the human conscience, when we come into close contact with men, there is no proof that he ever compromised or kept back a single truth to insure their favour. His single object was to commend himself to God. While he depreciated none of the ordinances of Christ's house, he was intensely solicitous that no one should ever infer from his teaching, that the due administration of sacraments by priestly hands was all that was required to insure the acceptance of a sinner's soul. He conceived that there could be no greater heresy "than for a man to believe that he is absolved from his sin if he give money, or because a priest layeth his hand on the head, and saith, I absolve thee." He maintained that the state of the heart enters into all true repentance, and determines the condition of the man before God. There is no discrepancy between his public ministrations and his private visitations. What he proclaimed aloud in the hearing of the living congregation, he whispered into the ear of the dying sinner. He had but one doctrine for the pulpit and for the closet, for the cottage and the mansion, for the peasant and the prince.

Wycliffe's estimate of the importance of preaching may be inferred from the following positions, taken from a manuscript in the Bodleian Library:

"I. The highest service that men may attain to on earth, is to preach the Word of God. This service falls peculiarly to priests, and therefore God more straitly

demands it of them. Thereby should they produce children to God, and that is the end for which God has wedded the Church. Lovely it might be, to have a son that were lord of this world, but fairer much it were to have a son in God, who, as a member of holy Church, shall ascend to heaven. And for this cause Jesus Christ left other works, and occupied Himself mostly in preaching; and thus did His apostles, and for this God loved them.

"II. Also, he does best who best keeps the commandments of God. Now, the first commandment of the second table bids us honour our elders, as our father and mother. But this honour should be first given to holy Church, for she is the mother we should most love, and for her, as our faith teaches, Christ died. The Church, however, is honoured most by the preaching of God's Word, and hence this is the best service that priests may render unto God. Thus a woman said to Christ, that the womb which bare Him, and the breasts which He had sucked, should be blessed of God; but Christ said, rather should that man be blessed who should hear the words of God, and keep them. And this should preachers do more than other men, and this word should they keep more than any other treasure. Idleness in this office is to the Church its greatest injury, producing most the children of the fiend, and sending them to his court.

"III. Also, that service is the best which has the worst opposed to it. But the opposite of preaching is of all things the worst; and therefore preaching,

if it be well done, is the best of all. And, accordingly Jesus Christ, when He ascended into heaven, commanded it especially to all His apostles, to preach the gospel freely to every man. So, also, when Christ spoke last with Peter, He bade him thrice, as he loved Him, to feed His sheep ; and this would not a wise shepherd have done, had he not Himself loved it well. In this stands the office of the spiritual shepherd. As the bishop of the temple hindered Christ, so is he hindered by the hindering of this deed. Therefore Christ told them, that at the day of doom Sodom and Gomorrah should better fare than they. And thus, if our bishops preach not in their own persons, and hinder true priests from preaching, they are in the sin of the bishops who killed the Lord Jesus Christ."

In several places he gives us his views on the prerequisites of a true preacher, and on the character of his instruction. This is especially the case in two sermons on Luke viii. 4–15. He insists above everything else that the preacher should set forth and enforce the Word of God ; inasmuch as it is through this Christians are to be edified, and the ungodly saved. Speaking of the phrase, " The seed is the Word of God," he exclaims ; " O marvellous power of the Divine seed, which overpowers strong men, softens hard hearts, and renews and changes into Divine, men who had been brutalised by sins, and had departed from God ! Such a change as this could never be wrought by the word of a priest, if the Spirit of Life and the Eternal Word did not, above all things else,

work with it." He insists on the adaptation of preaching to the state and needs of the people, and maintains the importance of devout feeling in the preacher. "If the soul is not in tune with the words, how can the words have power? If thou hast no love, thou art sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." Not only must the preacher speak *from* the heart; he must also speak *to* the heart. "In every proclamation of the gospel, the true teacher must address himself to the heart, so as to flash the light into the spirit of the hearer, and to bend his will into obedience to the truth."

With these views of the institution of preaching the gospel, our Reformer did not confine himself to his own ministry, but sought to promote preaching throughout the country. For this purpose he established his order of "Poor Priests." They were neither more nor less than evangelists, whose business it was to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation in season and out of season, and in every place where they could obtain an audience. It is difficult to say when he began to send these preachers abroad. We know that in 1382 they were travelling hither and thither, fully occupied in their blessed work. It was not his intention that these men should act in opposition to the parochial clergy. It is true that in his tract on *The Pastoral Office*, he exposes and condemns the worldliness of these clergy—their non-residence in their parishes, and their abandonment of preaching; nevertheless, he defends the order in so far as any of its members faithfully discharge their duty. His

purpose in the present movement was really to supply their lack of service. At first the preachers were exclusively men who had received orders in the Church; subsequently, however, this restriction was disregarded, and all suitable persons were employed who willingly gave themselves to the work. Their sermons were full of Bible truth, the arrangement was simple, and the style of address plain and pointed. They endeavoured to awaken the people to a sense of their guilt and danger as sinners, bringing to bear on their consciences and hearts the powers of the world to come. They set before their hearers, in so far as they understood it themselves, the way of salvation by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In adverting to the evils of the age, they held up before all ranks their lusts and vices; and in all their teaching they enforced righteousness of life and implicit obedience to the Word of God.

We cannot do better than close this chapter with a graphic account of these preachers, furnished by one of Wycliffe's ablest biographers,—Dr. Robert Vaughan. Describing the preamble of the statute prepared by the bishops, in 1382, against them, he says, "There is even in this dry law-paper something of the pictorial. These 'poor priests,'—these sturdy, free-spoken, and popular *Methodists* of the fourteenth century, are here travelling before us, from county to county, from town to town, and from village to village, barefooted, staff in hand, the visible personation of the toilsome, the generous, the noble-hearted. In churches or churchyards, in markets or

fairs, before gentle or simple, pious or profligate,—wherever men or women are gathered together, or may be gathered, there the itinerant instructor of this school finds his preaching-place, and discourses boldly on the difference between the religion of the Bible, with its appeals to every man's reason and conscience, and the superstitions of the priests, which have nothing to sustain them save that hollow mockery called the superstition of the Church. Prelates and abbots, mendicants and monks, rectors and curates, become wrathful; but the people are not wrathful. Almost to a man they attest that the stranger is in the right, and that harm shall not be done to him. Knighton mentions a number of persons of some figure who openly favoured the new preachers; such as Sir Thomas Latimer, Sir John Trussell, Sir Lodowich Clifford, Sir John Peche, Sir Richard Story, and Sir John Hilton. It was the manner of these distinguished persons, as our historian informs us, when a preacher of the Wycliffe Order came into their neighbourhood, to give notice to all the neighbourhood of time and place, and to draw a vast audience together. Even beyond this did they proceed; for you might see them standing round the pulpit of the preacher, armed, and prepared to defend him from assault with their good swords, if there should be need. Knighton, who complains of this mode of proceeding as being rather Mohammedan than Christian in its spirit, is nevertheless obliged to give these Lollard or Puritan knights the credit of being governed by a zeal for God, but not

according to knowledge." The advent of the preacher is the signal for the interference of the magistrate; and an officer is sent to warn him of his danger, and order him to depart. "The local official, not daring to go further, serves his writ upon the disorderly stranger, requiring him to appear before his ordinary; but the stranger is speedily elsewhere, and at his wonted labour. Proud churchmen thunder their anathema against him; to him it is an empty sound. The soul under that coarse garb, and which plays from beneath that weather-worn countenance, is an emancipated soul; not so much the image of the age in which we find it, as the prophecy of an age to come; to come only after a long, a dark, and a troubled interval shall have passed away!"[1]

[1] *John de Wycliffe;* a Monograph, pp. 276–279.

CHAPTER XIII.

Wycliffe and the English Bible.

THERE can be no question that the Bible is one of the mightiest forces in moulding the character and history and destiny of mankind. It is of greater antiquity than any other book; it has been more widely circulated than any other; it has excited intenser hostilities, and awakened and nourished stronger attachments than any other; it comes with loftier pretensions and proposes larger ends than any other; and it has exercised a more powerful influence over the nations of the earth. It contains God's great revelation of mercy to mankind. In this book, God speaks to every individual man; and therefore it should be in every man's possession. Its contents are of such vast importance, and so intimately concern men, that no priest, or preacher, or commentator, should be suffered to come between them and the Divine message. When Alexander asked Diogenes if there was anything in which he could serve him, the philosopher replied, "Don't stand between me and the sun." In like manner nothing should stand between the soul of man and the Sun of Righteousness as it shines in the Word of God.

Acting under the influence of this conviction, Wycliffe felt that the English people needed not only the oral proclamation of the Gospel, but also

the possession of the Scriptures in their own hands, and in their own language, so that they might be able to read them for themselves. He therefore undertook the grand work of translating the whole Bible into the English tongue. That we may have some idea of the originality and greatness of this conception, it is necessary to ascertain what had been previously done in the way of providing the people with the Scriptures. It has been affirmed by Sir Thomas More and others, that complete translations of the Bible into English existed long before Wycliffe's time. More said that he himself had seen old manuscripts of the English Bible, which had been provided with the knowledge and consent of the bishops. Several Protestant scholars of the seventeenth century advocated similar views. Thomas James, the first librarian of the Bodleian Library, said he had held in his own hands an English manuscript Bible, which he considered much older than Wycliffe's day. Archbishop Usher and Henry Wharton both followed in the same line. These theories, however, have been proved erroneous. Wharton himself, several years after, discovered his error, and corrected it. It is certain that the manuscripts seen by More, and later by James, were nothing more than copies of Wycliffe's translation, several of which were in the hands of Popish prelates at the time of the Reformation.

It may be well to give a brief sketch of the work accomplished, in the way of furnishing English versions of Holy Scripture, prior to Wycliffe's time. In the early part of the Anglo-Saxon period, we

find several productions that treat of Biblical subjects. The poems attributed to Cædmon, a monk of Whitby, in the seventh century, contain several Old Testament passages; but we can scarcely call the work a version of the Scriptures. Mr. Wright, in his *Literature and Superstitions of England in the Middle Ages*, says, "The Old Testament was fertile in subjects which were agreeable to the feelings of Saxons,—wars and heroic deeds; and some poet, stringing together a few of the better poems on Scripture subjects by very unequal verses of his own, has formed a kind of poetic version of the Bible, which is preserved in a very mutilated state in a manuscript at Oxford, and which has been twice printed under the name of Cædmon. The inequality of the different parts of the poem attributed to Cædmon was first noticed by Conybeare. A fine poem on the Fall of the Angels, the Creation, and the Fall of Man, is awkwardly prefaced by a narration of the same story much more briefly told. Then we have a barren version of the chapters of Genesis to the close of the life of Abraham, except the accounts of the flood and of the war of the kings against Sodom, which are told in a superior style. Suddenly, without any connexion with that of Abraham, we are introduced to the history of Moses, which again is told in a very different manner, and has all the marks of being a separate poem. After the history of Moses follows that of Nebuchadnezzar, equally distinct and complete in itself, which occupies all the remainder of the first part. The second part comprises chiefly a poem on

the descent of Christ into Hades, a favourite story, known in somewhat later times as the 'Harrowing of Hell.'"

Two versions of the Psalter into Saxon are said to have been made in the eighth century, one by Aldhelm, Bishop of Sherborne, and the other by an anchorite called Guthlac. The earliest translation from the New Testament into Saxon was made by the venerable Bede, in the monastery of Jarrow on the Tyne. It consists of the Lord's Prayer and the Gospel of John. The story of the completion of this translation, though well-known, is so beautiful, that we reproduce it here. The holy man was on his death-bed, and his last hour had come. He was intently engaged dictating to his amanuensis, in the hope of completing the work before he died. "There remains now only one chapter; but it seems difficult for you to speak," said the scribe, as his pen traced on the parchment the last verse of the twentieth chapter of John. "It is easy," replied Bede; "take your pen, dip it in ink, and write as fast as you can." "Now, master," said the scribe, after hastily penning down the sentences from the translator's trembling lips, "now only one sentence is wanting." Bede repeated it. "It is finished!" said the scribe. "It is finished!" replied the dying saint; "lift up my head; let me sit in my cell, in the place where I have been accustomed to pray; and now glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." With the utterance of these words the spirit of the saint went to God.

"Alfred the Great, whose character and reign shine across the clouds of the dark ages like a brilliant gleam of light, whose patriotism was coupled with piety, and who sought the moral and religious improvement, as well as the civilisation of his people, engaged, in his latter days, upon a translation of the Psalms," and cherished the purpose of giving his people other parts of Scripture in their own tongue, but was cut off by death in the midst of his useful and holy task. Towards the close of the tenth century, Aelfric translated portions of several parts of the Old Testament; while in his homilies he supplied many Scripture quotations and renderings of the sacred text. In the library of Corpus Christi, Cambridge, there is a manuscript of four Gospels, in Saxon, anterior to the Conquest; and in the Bodleian is another copy of the same version. Referring to these vernacular versions, Archbishop Parker says, in his preface to the Bishops' Bible, "Our old forefathers, who ruled in this realm, in their times, and in divers ages, did their diligence to translate whole books of the Scriptures to the erudition of the laity. As yet, to this day, are to be seen divers books translated into the vulgar tongue, some by kings of the realm, some by bishops, some by abbots, some by other devout godly fathers. So desirous were they of old time to have the lay sort edified in godliness by reading in their vulgar tongue, that very many books be yet extant, though, for the age of the speech, and strangeness of the character of many of them, almost worn out of knowledge. In which books may be seen

evidently, how it was used among the Saxons to have in their churches read the four Gospels, so distributed and picked out in the body of the evangelists' books, that to every Sunday and festival day in the year they were sorted out to the common ministers of the church in their common prayers to be read to the people."

Before the year 1200, the Norman population of England possessed a translation of the Psalms, which was followed within half a century by a translation in verse of Bible history reaching down to the Babylonish captivity, and even a prose version of the whole Bible. Speaking of the Norman versions, Lechler says, "It is a remarkable fact, indeed, attested by men of special learning in this field, that the French literature of the Mediæval age was extremely rich in translations of the Bible,—that it surpassed, indeed, in this respect the literature of all the other European peoples. Still, it must always be borne in mind, as respects England in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, that the Norman tongue was only the language of the dominant race, of the higher classes, spoken at court, in the seats of the nobles and bishops, in the courts of justice, the churches, and the garrisons; while the Saxon lived on among the middle and lower strata of the population, —the traders, artisans, and peasantry. The Anglo-Norman translations of portions of the Bible could only therefore be of use to the privileged classes; while the mass of the people enjoyed none of the benefit, but, on the contrary, were all the less considered and provided for, the more those classes were

satisfied who had the power of the country in their hands."

From 1250 downwards we find several attempts at Biblical paraphrase and translation in the vernacular tongue. The earliest of these took a poetic form. To this class belongs the *Ormulum*, so called because written by a person named Orme. It consists of a very feeble history of the events described in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. The oldest prose translation of any Bible book into Old English dates from about 1325, when two translations of the Psalms appeared almost together: one by William of Shoreham, a parish priest in Kent; the other by Richard Rolle. William of Shoreham wrote the Psalms verse by verse in Latin and English, giving on the whole a verbal and faithful translation. Richard Rolle, called the Hermit of Hampole, is said to have been born at Thornton in Yorkshire, to have studied at Oxford, and returned home in his nineteenth year, when he at once took to a hermit's life. Subsequently, he laboured as an itinerant preacher in the northern parts of Yorkshire, and died at Hampole, near Doncaster, in 1349. At the suggestion of a nun, he, having first written a Latin Commentary on the Psalms, afterwards translated the Psalms themselves into English, and supplied a commentary in the same tongue.

The whole result of previous labours in furnishing vernacular versions of the Scriptures, stands thus: "1. A translation of the entire Bible was never during this whole period accomplished in England, and was

never even apparently contemplated. II. The Psalter was the only book of Scripture which was fully and *literally* translated into all the three languages,—Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and Old English. III. In addition, several books of Scripture, especially Old Testament books, were translated partially or in select passages, *e.g.* by Aelfric, laying out of view poetical versions and the Gospel of John, translated by Bede, which celebrated work has not come down to us. IV. Last of all—and this fact is of great importance—in none of these translations was it designed to make the Word of God accessible to the mass of the people, and to spread Scriptural knowledge among them. The only object which was had in view was partly to furnish aid to the clergy, and to render a service to the educated class."[1]

Such was the state of Biblical translations in England when Wycliffe undertook his great work. His views as to its importance may be gathered from some of his writings about this time. In his treatise on the *Truth and Meaning of Scripture* he maintains the sufficiency of Christ's law for all purposes of doctrine, and discipline, and daily conduct. He argues, "that a Christian man well understanding it, may gather sufficient knowledge during his pilgrimage upon earth; that all truth is contained in Scripture; that we should admit of no conclusion not approved there; that there is no court beside the court of heaven; that though there were a hundred popes, and all the friars in the world were turned into

[1] Lechler, Vol. I., p. 331.

cardinals, yet should we learn more from the gospel than we should from all that multitude; and that true sons will in no wise go about to infringe the will and testament of their Heavenly Father." Writing afterwards in support of the sufficiency of Scripture, and in defence of vernacular translations he says, "As the faith of the Church is contained in the Scriptures, the more these are known in an orthodox sense, the better. And since secular men should assuredly understand the faith, it should be taught them in whatever language is best known to them. Inasmuch, also, as the doctrines of our faith are more clearly and precisely expressed in the Scriptures than they may possibly be by priests, seeing, if one may venture so to speak, that many prelates are but too ignorant of Scripture, and as the verbal instructions of priests have many other defects, the conclusion is abundantly plain that believers should ascertain for themselves the matters of their faith by having the Scriptures in a language which they can fully understand. According to the constant doctrine of Augustine, the Scriptures contain the whole of truth, and this translation of them should therefore do at least this good, namely, placing bishops and priests above suspicion as to the parts of it which they profess to explain. Other means also, as prelates, the pope, and friars, may prove defective; and to provide against this, Christ and His apostles evangelized the greater portion of the world, by making known the Scriptures in a language which was familiar to the people."

Impressed with such sentiments as those we have

just quoted, our Reformer judged that he could not do a better service to his country, or to the Christian Church, than by giving the Scriptures to the English people in their own tongue. It seems probable that he began to devote his time and energies to this work about the year 1378. We obtain little information from his writings as to its progress; indeed, they contain few allusions to the work, either while in progress, or after its completion. Forshall and Madden, the editors of the Wycliffe Bible, consider that the germ of the work is to be found in a Commentary written by him on the Apocalypse. Others suppose we may find its beginning in single commentaries on the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. Lechler again, and others with him, date its commencement to an English translation of the Latin Harmony of the Gospels, which was made by Prior Clement in the second half of the twelfth century. Nothing, however, can be stated with certainty concerning this matter. The New Testament was translated first; and we may assume it as a fact that this was the work of his own hand. As he possessed no knowledge of Greek, the translation is not made from the original, but from the Latin Vulgate. The Old Testament was begun, either while the New was in progress, or soon after its completion; not, it would seem, by Wycliffe himself, but by one of his friends,—most probably Nicholas of Hereford, who carried it as far as the Apocrypha. From this point it was continued and completed by another hand,—probably Wycliffe's own. This also was rendered from the Vulgate.

Whether any assistance was derived from previous translations, we are unable to say; though it appears likely that the fragmentary versions already in existence would be utilised as far as it was thought desirable.

There can be no hesitation, although we have no opportunity of judging with certainty how much of the work was actually done by Wycliffe himself, in ascribing to him the honour due to such a glorious undertaking as that of presenting to the English people the whole Bible in their own tongue. The conception was his own; he contributed chiefly to its execution; and its progress and completion were due to his wisdom, and perseverance, and zeal. Friends and foes unite in their testimony to this fact. John Huss, in a tract written by him in 1411, says, speaking of Wycliffe,—"The English say that he translated the whole Bible from Latin into English." In the year 1412, Arundel, the primate of England, and his bishops addressed a memorial to Pope John XXIII., praying that he would pronounce sentence of condemnation on the heresy of Wycliffe and his followers; and in this memorial the Reformer is charged with having devised the plan of a translation of the Holy Scriptures into the mother-tongue. Knighton, writing about sixteen years after Wycliffe's death, distinctly says,—"Master John Wycliffe, by translating the Gospel into English, has laid it more open to the laity, and to women, who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding.

And in this way the Gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine, and that which was before precious to both clergy and laity is rendered as it were the common jest of both. The jewel of the Church is turned into the sport of the people, and what was hitherto the principal gift of the clergy and divines is made for ever common to the people."

As to the character of Wycliffe's translation, it is not surprising that it contained blemishes. When we consider the greatness of the undertaking, the difficulties under which the Reformer and his friends laboured, the wonder is that they did their work so well. "The portion executed by Hereford, embracing the Old Testament books, had a character of its own, differing much from Wycliffe's version of the New Testament in its method of translation, and in the form of its English idiom.—Hereford's translation is excessively literal, and keeps as close as possible, almost pedantically, to the Latin expression and order of the Vulgate. This makes the version very often stiff and awkward, forced and obscure.—The case is quite different with Wycliffe in the books which he translated, and above all in the New Testament. He ever keeps in view the spirit of his mother-tongue and the requirements of English readers, so that the translation is so simple as to be thoroughly readable. Nay more, it is a remarkable fact that Wycliffe's English style in his Bible translation, compared with his other English writings, rises to an uncommon pitch of perspicuity, beauty, and force.—Wycliffe's translation of the Bible marks an epoch in the development of the

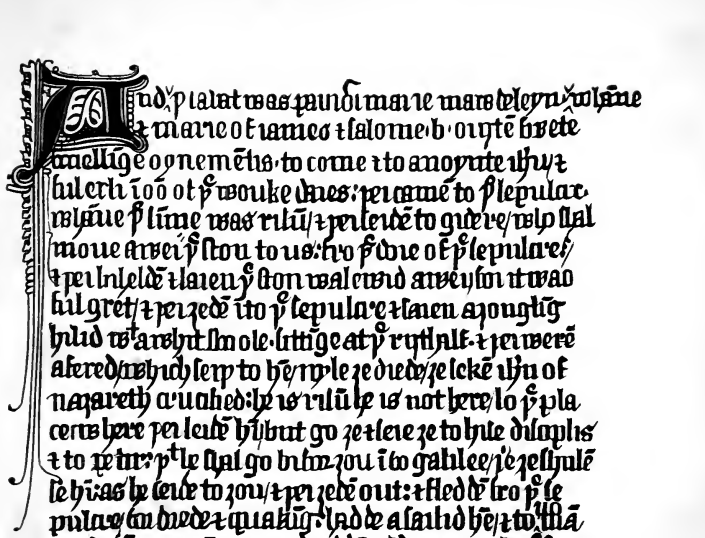
English language almost as much as Luther's translation does in the history of the German tongue."[1] Soon after the completion of the work, Wycliffe felt that a revision was necessary. This was a labour of time. The man who was chiefly engaged in this revision was John Purvey, who continued in the work until its completion in 1388, four years after the Reformer's death.

Wycliffe did not consider his labours ended with the translation of the Bible. This was only a means to an end. It was his great object to have the book placed if possible within the reach of all, and made the power of God to their salvation. The multiplication of copies and their circulation now engaged many hands. In several instances tables of the Bible lectures for Sundays and holy days were inserted. Single books of Scripture were also written out and circulated. The Bible lectures were published by themselves at a cheap price. "When the work of translating," says Wylie, in his *History of Protestantism*, "was ended, the nearly as difficult work of publishing began. In those days there was no printing-press to multiply copies by the thousand, as in our times; and no publishing firm to circulate these thousands over the kingdom. The author himself had to see to all this. The methods of publishing a book in that age were various. The more common way was to place a copy in the hall of some convent or in the library of some college, where all might come and read, and if the book pleased, order a copy

[1] Lechler, Vol. I., p. 346, 347.

to be made for their own use; much as, at this day, an artist displays his picture in a hall or gallery, where its merits find admirers, and often purchasers. Others set up pulpits at cross-ways, and places of public resort, and read portions of their work in the hearing of the audiences that gathered round them; and those who liked what they heard bought copies for themselves. But Wycliffe did not need to have recourse to these expedients. The interest taken in the man and in his work enlisted a hundred expert hands, who, though they toiled to multiply copies, could scarcely supply the many who were eager to buy. Some ordered complete copies to be made for them; others were content with portions; the same copies served several families in many instances; and in a very short time Wycliffe's English Bible had obtained a wide circulation, and brought a new life into many an English home."

"The reception of the work," says D'Aubigné, "surpassed Wycliffe's expectations. The Holy Scriptures exercised a reviving influence over men's hearts; minds were enlightened; souls were converted; the voices of the poor priests had done little in comparison with this voice; something new had entered into the world. Citizens, soldiers, and the lower classes, welcomed this new era with acclamations; the high-born curiously examined the unknown book; and even Anne of Luxemburg, wife of Richard II., having learnt English, began to read the Gospels diligently. She did more than this; she made them known to Arundel, Archbishop of York, and Chancellor, and afterwards



FACSIMILE OF ST. MARK 16TH, FROM A WYCLIFFE BIBLE IN THE LIBRARY OF LAMBETH PALACE. (*Slightly reduced*).

a persecutor, but who now, struck at the sight of a foreign lady, of a queen, humbly devoting her leisure to the study of *such virtuous books*, commenced reading them himself, and rebuked the prelates who neglected this holy pursuit. 'You could not meet two persons on the highway,' says a contemporary writer, 'but one of them was Wycliffe's disciple.'"[1]

[1] *History of the Reformation*, Vol. v.

CHAPTER XIV.

Wycliffe as a Christian, Theologian, and Reformer.

THERE is a moral and religious experience common to the children of God. All being the partakers of a Divine life, this life has its progress and development. In some, it may be more rapid and marked than in others; but in all, the fruits of the Spirit will in due season be manifest. Now, just as the fruit will correspond with the tree, or the stream with the fountain, so the outward character will mark the inward spiritual condition. It will indicate not only the reality of that great spiritual change which is involved in regeneration, and in which all things become new, but also the depth and the power of the religious life. The life of God cannot be daily flowing into the soul, and yet there be no out-coming of this higher vitality. It will seek expression and find embodiment.

Judging from the depth and intensity of the devotion which marked his riper years—from the character of his faith, which so emphatically determined the character of his devotion—from his attachment to the doctrine of grace, as excluding all human merit from the ground of a sinner's justification—from his refined enjoyment of the consolations and pleasures of religion—and from the practical and uplifting

tendency of his ministry—we must conclude that Wycliffe was at this time the subject of an advanced religious life. He could not spend so much time as he did in the culture of his own spirit, and in communion with God, without becoming a holier man. He grew in grace as well as in knowledge. We say not that he had attained, or was now perfect. The infirmities of our common humanity still attached to him. His feelings were not so subdued and softened —his temper was not so chastened—his charity was not so Christ-like, as could have been desired. But still he was emphatically a man of God.

The same progression which marked his Christian experience marked also his career as a theologian and a reformer. There were growth and development. Gradually he shook himself free from the fetters which bound him, and entered into the liberty of the sons of God. His writings and his whole course of public conduct furnish abundant evidence of this. In his *Trialogus*, speaking of certain metaphysical views he had once held, he says that at the time he held them he was sunk in the depths of the sea, and had stammered out many things which he was unable clearly to make good. In another of his writings, still in manuscript, there occurs, in connexion with some remarks on the freedom of the human will, this passage: "Other statements which at one time appeared strange to me, now appear to me to be sound and true, and I defend them; for when I was a child in the knowledge of the faith, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child; but when, in God's strength, I

became a man, I put away, by His grace, childish thoughts."

Speaking elsewhere of his imperfect knowledge of the Bible in his earlier years, he remarks, "At last the Lord, by the power of His grace, opened my mind to understand the Scriptures." His sermons and his writings testify to his advancing maturity in Divine knowledge. They afford abundant evidence that on many subjects—some of them being of the highest importance—the conclusions of his later years widely differed from the views to which he gave utterance when he first entered on his public work. At no period of his life, however, did he attempt to present his theological views in a systematic form. He uttered the truth of God as he found it in the Scriptures, according to the way in which he understood it at the time; and just as there is the absence of all formal method in the Bible, so there is the absence of all formal method in his teaching.

He maintains that the Bible is the Word of God,—His will and testament, which cannot be broken, and must be obeyed. It contains exactly that which was needed, and which is indispensable to salvation. In speaking of the universal adaptation of the gospel, he says: "If Christ had gone more into detail even in the least, the rule of His religion would have become to a certain extent imperfect; but as it now stands, whether layman or cleric, married man or monk, servant or master, a man may live in every position of life in one and the same service under Christ's rule. The evangelical law, moreover, contains no special

ceremonies whereby the universal observance of it would have been made impossible; and therefore the Christian rule and religion, according to the form of it handed down to us in the gospel, is of all religions the most perfect, and the only one which is in and by itself good."

Upon this view of the authority of the Word of God, and its adaptation to all classes, he grounds the exhortations which we find in his *Short Rule of Life:* "If thou art *a priest*, or one having the charge of souls, live holily, surpassing other men in holy prayer, desire, and thinking, in holy speaking, counselling, and true teaching. Let God's commands, His gospel, and virtues, be ever in thy mouth; and ever despise sin to draw men therefrom. Let thy deeds be so rightful that no man shall blame them with reason, but that thy open deeds be a true book to all subjects and unlearned men to serve God and do His commands thereby. If thou art *a lord* or master, having authority over others, look thou labour right for life in thine own person, both in respect to God and man, keeping the commandments of God, and doing the works of mercy. Govern well thy wife, thy children, and thy household attendants in God's law, and suffer no sin among them, neither in word nor in deed, that they may be examples of holiness and righteousness to all others.—Govern well thy tenants, and maintain them in right and reason, and be merciful to them in their rents and worldly payments, and suffer not thine officers to do them wrong, nor be extortionate to them.— Love, reward, praise, and

cherish the true and virtuous of life, more than if those sought only thine own profit.—Reverence and maintain truly, according to thy skill and might, God's law and the true preachers thereof, and God's servants who teach Christ's gospel and His life, and warn the people of their great sins, and of false prophets and hypocrites, that deceive Christian men in faith, virtuous life, and worldly goods.—If thou art *a labourer*, live in meekness, and truly and willingly do thy labour, that thy lord or thy master, if he be a heathen man, by thy meekness, willing and true service, may not have to grudge against thee, nor slander thy God, nor thy Christian profession.—God that putteth thee in such service knoweth what state is best for thee, and will reward thee more than all earthly lords, if thou dost it truly and willingly for His ordinance. In all things beware of grudging against God and His visitation; beware of wrath, of cursing, of speaking evil, of banning or execrating man or beast; and ever keep patience, meekness, and charity, both to God and man."

From the Divine origin and absolute authority of Scripture, Wycliffe argues its infallibility and sufficiency. Nothing is to be placed on an equality with it, still less above it. The man who enforces and practises a mixture of God's truth and human traditions, he calls *mixtim-theologus*, a medley divine. This devotion to the Bible, and maintenance of its sufficiency as a rule of faith and practice was one of Wycliffe's foundation truths,—it was the fundamental principle of the Reformation in the sixteenth century,

and it is the fundamental principle of the evangelical Protestantism of our own day.

Not only is Scripture all-sufficient as a rule of faith, but the very existence of a revelation from God is an appeal to the individual judgment and conscience. If otherwise, whence did the Church receive her interpretation? It must either have been by inspiration or by the solution of her own acknowledged doctors and teachers. If by inspiration, then it is a part of the revelation itself,—something superadded, and communicating additional information. If by the solution of learned and holy men, then their reasonings and conclusions can be regarded in no other light than the result of private thought and devout study. And if they could, as finite and erring men, reach conclusions which it is right and safe for the Church to accept, why may not other men, and every man, reach conclusions equally safe? Before we can give up the sufficiency of Scripture, and the right of private judgment, we must be satisfied that we can at the same moment transfer the burden of accountability from ourselves to the conscience of another—that he will take our place at the bar of God, and subject himself to all the consequences incident to the possibility of our being at last found in fatal error.

Our Reformer recognised the right and duty of every man to use the Bible for himself. In his treatise concerning the *Truth of Scripture*, he says: "Holy Scripture is the faultless, most true, most perfect, and most holy law of God, which it is the duty of all men to learn to know, to defend, and to observe, inasmuch

as they are bound to serve the Lord in accordance with it." In his tract entitled *The Wicket*, he says: "If God's Word is the life of the world, and every word of God is the life of the human soul, how may any Antichrist, for dread of God, take it away from us that be Christian men, and thus to suffer the people to die for hunger?" It was the importance which he thus attached to the Bible, and the fidelity and fulness with which he taught its great truths, that procured for him the honourable title bestowed upon him by his friends and followers, both in England and on the Continent, of Doctor Evangelicus. His knowledge of the Bible was astounding. By diligent reading, and patient, prayerful study, he became familiar with it from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. We find its texts largely scattered through many of his writings; not bare quotations, but passages explained and applied.

It has been justly said, that "his Bible knowledge is almost more remarkable in cases when it is not his object to quote Scripture, but when, notwithstanding, the whole life and movement of what he writes is in Scripture thought and phrase." Wycliffe had drunk deep at the fountain of inspiration. Not more refreshing to the traveller across the desert could be a stream of living water, than were the truths of the Bible to our reformer. With a soul morally free and pure, he had a growing capacity for higher knowledge and more heavenly training. Susceptible of the fuller and more perfect illumination of the Spirit, he moved along the path of truth with a calm and persevering

progress. He was taught of God; and as his Divine education advanced, his desire to communicate what he had learned and received became stronger and still more intense. Other men may have been as fully enlightened and as well instructed in "the deep things of God," but they occupied not the same position, nor could they have commanded the same attention. He was a Divinely chosen organ, through which God spoke to man in an age of deep spiritual torpor and death.

Wycliffe held and taught that man was fallen through Adam's transgression; and that by his own righteousness he could neither merit the Divine favour nor obtain forgiveness. His views of sin, and forgiveness, and salvation, may be gathered from his homilies. The following sentences may serve as specimens of his teaching on these points:—"There is no sin done but what is against God; and the greater the Lord is against whom the sin is done—the greater always is the sin. We hold it as a part of our faith, that as our first parents had sinned, there must be atonement made for sin, according to the righteousness of God. For as God is merciful, so He is full of righteousness. But except He keep His righteousness in this point, how may He judge all the world? It is to speak lightly to say that God might, of His mere power, forgive this sin, without the atonement which was made for it, since the justice of God would not suffer this, but requires that every trespass be punished, either in earth or in hell. God may not accept a person, to forgive him his sin,

without an atonement, else He must give free licence to sin, both in angels and men, and then sin were no sin, and our God were no God. As man's nature trespassed, so must man's nature render atonement. An angel, therefore, would in vain attempt to make atonement for man, for he has not the power to do it, nor was his the nature that here sinned. The person to make the atonement must be God and man; for then the worthiness of this person's deeds were even with the unworthiness of the sin. Yet the passion of Christ was the most voluntary passion that ever was suffered. He came to His suffering in a way to show His free will. In Christ's passion were all things which could make it the more meritorious. We should believe that Christ suffered not, in any measure, but for some certain reason; for He is both God and man, who made all things in their number, and so would frame His passion to answer to the greatness of man's sin. Follow we, then, after Him, in His blessed passion, and keep we ourselves from sin hereafter, and gather we a devout mind from Him."

He often and largely dwells on the dignity of Christ's person as the Son of God, and the grandeur of His work as the only Mediator between God and man. He sets Him forth as our Prophet, Priest, and King, and insists on the efficacy of His sacrifice on the cross, and the free justification of the sinner through faith in that sacrifice. In a Passion Sermon, he remarks that Christ is saying every day in our hearts, "This I suffered for thee, and what dost thou suffer for Me?" As an illustration of the faith which

saves the sinner, he employs in one place the incident of the brazen serpent in the wilderness: "As a right-looking on the adder of brass saved the people from the venom of serpents, so a right-looking by full belief on Christ saveth His people. Christ died not for His own sins, as thieves do for theirs; but as our Brother, who Himself might not sin, He died for the sins that others had done." The faith which saves is, he maintains, the result of the gracious operation of the Spirit of God, by whom it is wrought in the believer's heart; and it is a faith which not only justifies from condemnation, but also leads to holiness of life.

The Reformer, in his teaching, always insisted on the importance of Christian virtue. He maintained that justification is always accompanied by sanctification; that there is an eternal distinction between virtue and vice; that whomsoever the Spirit quickens He purifies, whom He enlightens He transforms; that the Spirit is the first and producing cause of all those holy affections and higher graces which enter into and complete the character of the Christian. However far he carried the doctrines of free grace, it is clear that he held them in righteousness of life. He says: "Let us then deny ourselves in whatever we have made ourselves by sin; and such as we are made by grace, let us continue. If a proud man be converted to Christ, and is made humble, he hath denied himself. If a covetous man ceaseth to covet, and giveth of his own to relieve the needy, he hath denied himself. If an impure man changeth his life, and be-

cometh chaste, he hath denied himself. He who withstandeth and forsaketh the unreasonable will of the flesh denieth himself. The cross of Christ is taken when we shrink not from contempt for the love of the truth; when man is crucified unto the world, and the world is crucified unto him, and he setteth its joy at nought. It is not enough to bear the cross of a painful life, except we follow Christ in His virtues, in meekness, love, and heavenly desire. . . . What is turning to God? Nothing but turning from the world, from sin, and from the fiend. What is turning from God, but turning to the changing things of this world, to delight in the creatures, the lusts of the flesh, and the works of the fiend? To be turned from the world is to set at nought its joys, and to suffer meekly all bitterness, slanders, and deceits, for the love of Christ; to leave all occupations unlawful and unprofitable to the soul, so that man's will and thought become dead to the things which the world loveth and worshippeth."

Christ is held up as our great Exemplar; and we are taught that the nearer the life of the Christian comes to Christ, the richer it is in goodness. Christ is shown to be the supreme object of the believer's love,—the chief source and fountain of his joy. An extract or two from *The Love of Jesus* reveals the inmost life and experience of Wycliffe himself, and may serve as a sample of his teaching on experimental religion. It is the language of a soul which can find no object but Him in whom it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell, on which its

desires and affections can rest: "O Thou everlasting Love! inflame my mind to love God, that it burn not but to His callings. O good Jesus! who shall give to me that I feel Thee. Thou must now be felt, and not seen. Enter into the inmost recesses of my soul; come into mine heart, and full fill it with Thy most clear sweetness; make my mind to drink deeply of the fervent wine of Thy sweet love, that I, forgetting all evils, and all vain visions, and scornful imaginations, Thee only embracing, joying I may rejoice in my Lord Jesus.

"Thou most sweet Lord, from henceforward pass not from me! Dwell with me in Thy sweetness!—for only Thy presence is to me solace or comfort, and only Thy absence leaves me sorrowful. O Thou Holy Ghost, who inspirest where Thou wilt, come into me, draw me to Thee, that I despise and set at nought in my heart all things of this world. Inflame my heart with Thy love, which shall without end burn upon Thine altar.

"There are three degrees of Christ's love, in which those that are chosen to God's love go from one to another. The first is called *insuperable*, the second is *inseparable*, the third is called *singular*. Love is insuperable, when it cannot be overcome with any other affection or love, or trial or temptation; when it gladly casts down all other hindrances, and all temptations, and quenches fleshly desires. And blessed is the soul that is in this state; every labour is light to him that loveth truly, neither can any man better overcome travail than by love.

"Love is inseparable, when man's mind is in-

flamed with great love, and cleaves to Christ by inseparable thought; not suffering Christ to be any moment out of his mind, but as though he were bound in the heart, Him he thinketh upon, to Him with great earnestness he draweth his spirit. Therefore, when the love of Christ so groweth in the heart of the lover of God, and the despiser of the world, so that it may not be overcome of any other affection or love, then it is said to be high. When man cleaveth to Christ undepartingly, thinking upon Him, forgetting Him for no other occasion, then man's love is said to be inseparable and everlasting. And what love can be more or greater than this?

"The third degree of Love is singular. If thou seekest or receivest any other comfort than of thy God, even though thou lovest highly, thou lovest not singularly. This degree is highest and most wonderful to attain, for it hath no peer. Singular love is, when all solace and comfort is closed out of the heart but the love of Jesus alone. Other delight or other joy pleaseth not; for the sweetness of Him is so comforting and lasting—His love is so burning and gladdening, that he who is in this degree may well feel the fire of love burning in his soul. That fire is so pleasant that no man can tell it but he that feeleth it, and not fully he. Then the soul is Jesus loving, on Jesus thinking, and Jesus desiring, only burning in coveting of Him, singing in Him, resting on Him. He that most withdraws his love from the world, and from unreasonable lusts, shall be most able, and most speedily increase in these degrees of love. Those

that have liking in any other thing than in Jesus, and in the sweetness of His law, come not to this degree of love. In the first degree are some, in the second but few, in the third scarcely any. For the higher the living is, and the more it profits, the fewer lovers it hath, and the fewer followers."

We find a similar growth in Wycliffe's teaching concerning Christian worship and ordinances, to that which marks his doctrinal instruction. In his earlier years, he held that the mother of our Lord was to her worshippers a mediatrix full of mercy; and he goes so far as to say, that, "There is no sex or age, no rank or position of any one in the whole human race, which has no need to call for the help of the Holy Virgin." Such statements are altogether wanting in his later ministry. In his *De Dominio Civili,* he holds that by virtue of the consecration, bread and wine are "changed into the body and blood of Christ, so that now only the sensible properties of bread and wine are present,—the accidents without the substance or their underlying basis;" but in the petition which he presented to Parliament, in November, 1382, he repudiates the idea of the Real Presence in the Sacrament, and prays that the doctrine of the Eucharist may be openly taught in all the churches, as Christ and His apostles had left it. While admitting that images may be helpful to a devout mind, he condemns the extreme sensuousness of the prevailing worship, and exclaims, "Would that so many ceremonies and symbols were not multiplied in our Church;" and he declares, that it behoves men to be

on their guard "against an idolatrous worship of the image, instead of the Divine Being imaged." Pilgrimages and relics became in his estimation, in after years, not only useless, but even injurious; and he affirms that Christian people would do better to stay at home, and keep God's commandments in private, than to make pilgrimages and bring gifts to the thresholds of the saints.

As to Church constitution and government, Wycliffe discarded the dogma that the clergy alone constituted the Church. The Church, he said, was made up of the entire body of believers. Here are his words: "When men speak of Holy Church, anon they understand prelates and priests, with monks and canons and friars, and all men who have tonsures, though they live accursedly and never so contrary to the law of God. But they call not the seculars men of Holy Church, though they live never so truly, according to God's law, and die in perfect charity. Nevertheless, all who shall be saved in the bliss of heaven are members of Holy Church, and no more. Christian men taught in God's law, call Holy Church the congregation of just men, for whom Jesus Christ shed His blood; and not mere stones and timber, and earthly dross, which the clerks of Antichrist magnify more than the righteousness of God and the souls of men."

The supremacy of the pope has ever been regarded as the key-stone in the great extended arch of the papacy. To aim a blow at this supremacy was one of the chief purposes of Wycliffe's life, to the accomplishment of which he devoted his most strenuous

efforts. Nor can he be said to have been either unwarranted or premature in adopting his line of action. The Church had raised herself above all law. The hierarchy claimed universal empire and universal possession. The priest of Rome was held to be "the master of the emperor,—the fellow of God,—the Deity on earth!" The papal schism which presented Urban and his followers in conflict with Clement and his followers fully opened the Reformer's eyes.

"All the usurpations of the papacy hitherto censured and opposed by Wycliffe were now seen by him for the first time, in the light of a corruption of Christianity of the widest extent and immeasurably deep, for which he could find no more appropriate name than Antichristianism. The systematic spoliation of the national churches, the haughty pride, the worldly character of the papal government, the claims to hierarchical domination over the whole world, all these features of the degenerate papacy were attacked by Wycliffe after this date as well as before; but were now for the first time seen by him in their connexion with what was the worst feature of all, with an assumption of Divine attributes and rights which seemed to him to stamp the pope as the Antichrist.—'But now,' he remarks, 'it is nothing else but blasphemy when the pope puts forward claims to Divine rights and Divine honours, and almost raises himself above Christ, whose position upon earth he pretends to represent.' No wonder that Wycliffe, when he once went so far as this, did not shrink even from the thought that the papal office itself is of the wicked one."[1]

[1] Lechler, Vol. II., pp. 137, 138.

The various gradations of rank in the ministers of the Church came under the Reformer's censure. In his *Trialogus* he says: "From the faith of the Scriptures it seems to me to be sufficient that there should be presbyters and deacons holding that state and office which Christ has imposed on them, since it appears certain that these degrees and orders have their origin in the pride of Cæsar." He observes again,—"I boldly assert one thing, namely, that in the primitive Church, or in the time of Paul, two orders of the clergy were sufficient, that is, a priest and a deacon. In like manner, I affirm that in the time of Paul, the presbyter and bishop were names of the same office."

The celibacy of the priesthood came under his condemnation. In his treatise concerning *Wedded Men and Wives*, he declares that neither Christ nor His apostles have forbidden the marriage of priests; they have rather approved it. He points not only to the usage of the primitive Church to consecrate married men as bishops, but also to the still existing practice of the marriage of the clergy in the Greek Church. He shows the many evils to which celibacy leads, and maintains that in all cases it is better for a priest to live as a married man. While he never allows himself to be shaken in his conviction that the pastoral office, more than any other, when rightly exercised, is the most useful, and for the Church the only indispensable office, at the same time, his denunciation of the thorough worldliness of those pastors who neglected the service of God for hunting, feasting, and boon companionship are very strong.

It is evident from all Wycliffe's teaching, and from the entire course of his life, that he felt the need, and had in his mind an idea of the general reformation of the Church. He was so impressed with its corruptions, and the vices of society in general, that he felt constrained to devote himself to this work. In one of his writings he declares that he had formed the design to lead back the Church to the institutions of Christ, and in pure conformity to His Word. Difficulties and dangers crowded upon his path, but nothing intimidated by the one, he never grew pale in the presence of the other. He was braced for action, and with his soul all on fire, he challenged every opposing force. Conscious of his intellectual might, and with the shield of faith over him, he was prepared to grapple with the sturdiest and strongest of the enemy. His language often sounds like the trumpet-call of a leader, who is collecting a party and leading them in closed ranks into the battle. He was not moved by vain ambition, or by enmity to any class of his fellow-men. "It was from glowing zeal for the cause of God, sincere love to the souls of men, upright conscientiousness before God, and heartfelt longing for the reformation of the Church of Christ, that he put forth all his energetic and indefatigable labours, for the carrying back of the Church to her original purity and freedom, as she had flourished in the primitive Christian age. He grew himself with the holy aims which he pursued; his personal character was exalted by the cause which he served; and the cause which he served was never the truth as mere knowledge, but

the truth as a power unto godliness." He could say in all sincerity, in one of his *Saints' Days' Sermons:* "Let God be my witness, that before everything I have God's glory in my eye, and the good of the Church, which springs out of reverence for Holy Scripture and following the law of Christ."

In this enterprise, he seems to have some foreshadowing of martyrdom. It cannot be said that he was called to make any costly sacrifice. The privations and the sufferings of many of his followers far exceeded his own. With the increase of the Lollards, as the disciples of the Reformation were styled, the hierarchy called aloud for the punishment of those who dissented from the teachings of the Church. Penal statutes were enacted, and such as refused to abjure their heretical opinions were held obnoxious to the secular power. Fines, confiscation, imprisonment, and death followed. But Christianity is the religion of true heroism. The intrepidity, the courage, the invincible firmness of her suffering children, have challenged the admiration of the world in all ages. These noble attributes triumphantly came out in the character and conduct of those despised Lollards. Many of them took joyfully the spoiling of their goods —endured with the meekness of Christ—in the very depth of their affliction committed themselves in the confidence of faith unto Him that judgeth righteously, and for the truth's sake loved not their lives even unto death. While the fire of persecution was scorching and consuming his followers, Wycliffe escaped unhurt. Its lambent flame played about

him, but scarcely touched him. He was Divinely protected and spared. Still he was ready for martyrdom, and was not sure how soon it might be his lot. His trust, however, was in God; to Him he looked for strength, and through Him he expected the victory. Hence he exclaims,—"Oh that God would give me a docile heart, persevering stedfastness, and love to Christ, to His Church, and to the members of the devil who are butchering the Church of Christ, that I might out of pure love encounter and lay hold of them. What a glorious cause for me to give up the present miserable life for! For this same was the cause of the martyr-death of Christ."

As to the character of Wycliffe's reformation efforts, "it does not admit of being defined in simple and few words, and for this reason, that his reformation ideas passed through different transmutations and developments, precisely the same as those of his whole personality. Wycliffe, indeed, from the time when, in mature age, he entered upon public life and drew attention upon himself, down to the end of his career, was always inspired by the reformational spirit. That the Church as she then stood was suffering under evil conditions; that she stood in indispensable need of renovation and reform, this was and ever remained his firm conviction; and for this object he at all times continued to do what he could. But what the worst of these conditions were, and how they were to be remedied—on these points he thought differently at a later period from what he did in his earlier life. In middle life his reformational views

bore an entirely ecclesiastico-political complexion; in the last six years of his course, from 1378, the political points of view retreated more into the background, and the religious motives came to the front."[1]

On Wycliffe's place as a Church reformer, his biographer adds,—"In the collective history of the Church of Christ, Wycliffe marks an epoch chiefly on the ground that he was the earliest *personal embodiment* of the evangelical reformer. Before him, it is true, many ideas of reform, and many efforts in the direction of it, crop up here and there, which even led to conflicts of opinion and collisions of parties, and gathered themselves up in the formation of whole reformed societies. But Wycliffe is the first important personality in history who devotes himself to the work of Church reform with the entire thought-power of a master mind, and with the full force of will and joyful self-sacrifice of a man in Christ. To that work he devoted the labours of a life, in obedience to the earnest pressure of conscience, and in confident trust that his labour was not in vain in the Lord. He did not conceal from himself that the labours of evangelical men would in the first instance be opposed and persecuted and driven back. Nevertheless, he consoled himself with the assurance that the ultimate issue would be a renovation of the Church upon the apostolic model. It was only after Wycliffe that other living embodiments of the spirit of Church reform, a Huss, a Savonarola, and others, appeared upon the field,—a succession which issued at length in the Reformation of the sixteenth century."

[1] Lechler, Vol. II., p. 313.

As if clothed with the light and armour of heaven, our Reformer took his ground and proclaimed eternal war with error and sin in all their forms. He had to do not so much with the world as with the Church. The evils which he dreaded were not from without, but from within. It was not so much with the avowed infidel as with the professed believer, he had to grapple. The grand contest of his age was between a spurious and a true Christianity. He had to enter the lists with those who professed to be the followers of the Lamb. He had to do battle with the Church itself. This fact it is which throws light on many of his writings. He looked at Christianity in its pure and practical bearing. He demanded its embodiment in the life, as a thing which had its seat in the heart. A spiritual religion was the great want of that age. It is the want of our own age. And the reformation of the nineteenth century must be sought in restoring to the whole Church of God a pure and living Christianity. It needs no mailed polemic to do battle with error. In all the varying forms which it has put on, it has been manfully and triumphantly met. The struggle is for truth. In this last struggle, the power of darkness will work itself to death; and truth having achieved her final victory, the Church shall come out of the crisis and the fiery trial, purer, and healthier, and clothed in the beauties of holiness.

CHAPTER XV.

Extent and Permanency of Wycliffe's Influence.

It is impossible to estimate the entire force and reach of individual influence. This important though trite observation is greatly intensified when applied to public men. Wycliffe's influence was felt and admitted during his lifetime. His learning and great mental power were freely acknowledged in his own age, not only by his followers and those who were favourable to his opinions, but even by his enemies. His poor priests were a body of disinterested labourers and godly men, whose creed and opinions very closely corresponded with the well-known doctrines of their master; and through these men he controlled the thoughts and manners of multitudes of his fellow-countrymen. Even at Oxford his opinions prevailed to such an extent as to excite the indignation of the ecclesiastical authorities, and to justify the representation that "she who was formerly the mother of virtues, the prop of the Catholic faith, the singular pattern of obedience, now brought forth only abortive or degenerate children, who encouraged contumacy and rebellion, and sowed tares among the pure wheat." There the memory of the Reformer was cherished with profound veneration, and he was pronounced to be without an equal in logic, philosophy,

speculative learning, morals, and theology. Our national martyrologist says that he was "famously reputed for a great clerk, a deep schoolman, and no less expert in all kinds of philosophy."

Cunningham, who was one of his opponents, admired him for his distinguished abilities. Walden, who was one of his bitterest foes, writing of him to Pope Martin v., declared that he was astonished at his power of reasoning, and at the authorities by which he fortified his statements. Knighton, too, although he intensely disliked both the man and his doctrines, was yet bound to bear witness to his intellectual greatness. He says that he was a most eminent doctor of theology, that in philosophy he was reputed second to none, and that in scholastics he was incomparable. We may not place the same value on the kind of learning in which the Reformer excelled, as was placed on it by the men of that day; still, we cannot think of his powers and attainments without reverence. While he held this distinguished place, in relation to the learned studies of the age, among his compeers, he surpassed them all in Biblical knowledge,—"so that, while one was renowned for his profoundness, another for his perspicuousness, a third for all that was venerable, and a fourth as the brightest light in a constellation that was all brilliant,—it remained to Wycliffe to receive the higher honour still of being the evangelic or gospel doctor."

Although our Reformer never visited foreign countries to proclaim his doctrines, yet those doctrines were carried into almost every country in Europe by

his disciples and by his writings. John Huss and Jerome of Prague were among the first and most intrepid adherents to the new faith, and their testimony to that faith they both sealed with their blood. Nicholaus von Pelhrimow, a chronicler of the fifteenth century, tells us that "the books of the evangelical doctor, Master John Wycliffe, opened the eyes of the blessed Master John Huss, as several reliable men heard from his own lips, whilst he read and re-read them, together with his followers."

We read in the *Book of the Persecutions of the Bohemian Church*, that, "in the year A.D. 1400, Jerome of Prague returned from England, bringing with him the writings of Wycliffe." By these means Wycliffe's doctrine struck its roots into the soil of Continental Europe, and by God's blessing it bore abundant fruit. Paletz, one of the opponents of Huss, contending against that divine, employs these words: "Since the birth of Christ, no heretic has written more dangerously against the Church than thou and Wycliffe."

After the Reformer's death, those whom he left to represent and sustain the cause of truth bravely fulfilled their high trust. Political events favoured them. From the accession of the house of Lancaster to the time of the eighth Henry, both prince and prelate, clergy and laity, were found opposing the encroachments of the see of Rome, and the doctrines of the Reformer extended amid the kindlings and the widespreading flames of persecution. Still the Church maintained the ascendency, and churchmen succeeded to much of the place and the power which had been

previously possessed by the lay aristocracy. Enactments were passed, empowering the primate to "correct all who should obstinately preach or maintain, whether publicly or privately, any conclusion as from the sacred Scriptures, while contrary to the determination of the Church."

The Lollards petitioned parliament, and parliament began to agitate the question of ecclesiastical reform. The king was in Ireland, and messengers were despatched to lay before him the dangers to which the Church was exposed, and to advise his return home. His return effected but little for the party. The Pope addressed His Majesty, calling upon him to employ his authority, in connexion with that of the hierarchy, to root out and destroy the new heresy. The monarch had enough to do to attend to the temporal affairs of his kingdom. So matters remained till the accession of Henry of Lancaster, who proclaimed himself the protector of the Church against the assaults of the Lollards. The force of law now came into play. Penal enactments ran out even to the burning of heretics. And when the sceptre of England passed into the hands of Henry VIII., "the magnitude of papal power was almost beyond estimation. It had never failed to crush its opponents. The movements of the Albigensians had been defeated. The lips of Huss and Jerome had been sealed; and the Lollards had been prostrated beneath its gigantic strength. The world was its home. It had its altars among the vine-hills of France and the barren heaths of Scotland. Its temples stood where the Druid had

piled his rude stones, and the Saxon had worshipped Woden. Its splendid ceremonies had charmed the senses of northern clans, and captivated the imagination of Southern Europe. It had crowned Pepin, honoured Charlemagne, and immortalized Martel. It had decided on astronomy, and maintained the sole umpire in law and politics. It was sovereign at the fireside and every mart of trade. It was a hero in every romance, and a warrior in every battle. It held the keys of heaven and hell. It was above God."

The overthrow of this colossal system was the consummation to which the labours of Wycliffe would have conducted him, and therefore the Reformation of the sixteenth century was but the perfecting of his grand idea. From some cause or other—probably owing to the lack of accurate historical information—the German reformers never accorded to him that frank and impartial acknowledgment of obligation which was his due. Luther spoke slightingly of him as a "hair-splitter," and said that he attacked only the life of the Church, and not her doctrine; and Melancthon considered him unsound on the doctrine of justification. It must, however, be obvious to ourselves, looking at the relative position of the English Reformer and his German successors, as we see it in the clearer light of later history, that their structure was reared upon his foundation. It has been well said, that the whole circle of questions with which the later controversies of the Reformation have made us familiar received their first treatment at his hands. "In conducting this fundamental controversy

Wycliffe had to lay all the foundations with his own unaided hand. And it is no small praise to render to his work to say, that it was even as he laid them, line for line, stone for stone, that they were relaid by the master builders of the Reformation." [1]

The estimate in which universal Protestant Christendom holds our Reformer to-day may be presented in the words of Dr. Wylie: "Wycliffe possessed that combination of opposite qualities which makes the great man. As subtle as any schoolman of them all, he was yet as practical as any Englishman of the nineteenth century. With intuitive insight, he penetrated to the root of all the evils that afflicted England, and with rare practical sagacity he devised and set a-going the true remedies. But above all his other qualities—above his scholastic genius—his intuitive insight into the working of institutions—his statesmanship—was his fearless submission to the Bible. It was in this that the strength of Wycliffe's wisdom lay. It was this that made him a reformer, and that placed him in the first rank of reformers. It was under Wycliffe that English liberty had its beginning. It is not the political constitution which has come out of the Magna Charta of King John and the barons, but the moral constitution which came out of that Divine Magna Charta that Wycliffe gave her in the fourteenth century, which has been the sheet anchor of England. The English Bible wrote, not merely upon the page of the statute book, but upon the hearts of the people of England, the two command-

[1] Hanna's *Wycliffe and the Huguenots.*

ments—'Fear God; honour the king.' These two sum up the whole duty of nations; and on these two hangs the prosperity of states. There is no mysterious or latent virtue in our political constitution which, as some seem to think, like a good genius protects us, and with invincible hand guides past our shores the tempests that cover other countries with the memorials of their devastating fury. The real secret of England's greatness is her permeation, at the very dawn of her history, with the principles of order and liberty by means of the English Bible, and the capacity for freedom thereby created. This has permitted the development by equal stages of our love for freedom and our submission to law, of our political constitution and our national genius, of our power and our self-control,—the two sets of qualities fitting into one another, and growing into a well-compacted fabric of political and moral power unexampled on earth."

Wycliffe's labours, perfected in the work of the Reformation, delivered England from the domination of the Papal system, so deteriorating to civilization and social happiness, and all the higher developments and interests of our common humanity. But with this great organic change came no change in Popery. It remained the same in its principles and tendencies. It is the same still. Does not the pope still claim to be the supreme and infallible head of the Church—the vicegerent of God—supreme over all mortals—over all emperors, kings, princes, potentates, and people—king of kings and lord of lords—the Divinely-

appointed dispenser of temporal and spiritual punishments—armed with power to depose sovereigns, and absolve subjects from their oath of allegiance, and from whom lies no appeal? Does not every popish bishop, at his consecration, solemnly swear to persecute and fight against all heretics, schismatics, and rebels to our lord the pope and his successors? Does not every Jesuit, in his secret oath, swear to do the same thing? Does he not promise and pledge himself, on solemn oath, to extirpate the heretical Protestants' doctrine, and to destroy all their pretended powers, regal or otherwise? Has it not been the constant aim and effort of the Romish Church to exalt canon law above civil law, and thus subordinate the crown to the mitre? Is not this her object at the present time? Does she not deny the right of private judgment? Does she not withhold the Scriptures from the people? Does she not assert that the Bible is to be interpreted, not by the exercise of a man's own intelligence, enlightened and guided by the Spirit of God, but by the judgment and authority of the ancient fathers through the Church? If she hold some of the essential doctrines of Christianity in their integrity, are they not so overlaid with tradition as almost wholly to veil them from the mind of the people? Or do they not come out so checked, and crossed, and contradicted, and in so incoherent a style of representation, that their salutary influence is enervated, and, except in rare cases, totally prevented? Does she not deem any one who dissents from her creed a heretic? And does she not inculcate that

heretics ought to be punished to the very extreme of the law? Does she not teach auricular confession? Has not confession tended to undermine the virtue and the happiness of thousands? Have not the most sacred interests of families and of state been sacrificed to this ghostly power? Does not her monastic system form a vast police of spies and agents, devoted and sworn to promote the Papal ascendency? It will be a dark day for England if ever that ascendency be again known within her borders.

Whatever progress Popery may have made in our country, the Protestant element, is, we believe, too far down, and too deeply rooted in the national mind, and too intimately blended with the national character, to be easily eradicated or overcome. If the question be, whether we are to abandon those principles which have raised England to her present position, and under whose life-giving influence all her institutions have grown and advanced, till they now challenge the admiration of the whole civilized world, and to embrace principles which have sunk the proudest states of Europe and of antiquity—whether we shall have the England of the nineteenth century, with all its light, and intelligence, and freedom, and moral peace, or the England of the fourteenth century with its intellectual bondage, social wretchedness, and spiritual torpor—whether we shall exchange the pure regenerating, uplifting Christianity of our own day for the superstitions and corruptions of the Middle Ages—whether we shall be free men, free Englishmen, free Christians, or be the slaves of a foreign yoke—

the answer is at hand. Let the stars melt away from heaven's concave, let the sun go out in everlasting night, rather than England should be again reduced, in her social, intellectual, and moral condition, to the point at which she stood before the Reformation! Vain, we cordially trust, is the effort again to impose upon our country the yoke of Popery. Popery is opposed to the genius of our constitution, to the principles of justice, to the teachings of Christianity, to the deep sayings of the Book of God. The mind of England is being flooded with light and truth, and truth is the genius of freedom. The fiat has gone forth, and the hour is coming in which it shall be said—Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, the mother of harlots, and the abomination of the earth!

Popery pronounces Protestantism to be heresy; but it is a heresy which has saved England, and made her great, and glorious, and free. It is the palladium of her safety and her glory. Men may anticipate the decline and fall of Britain—they may predict a total eclipse of her light, or think that they see her sun now setting in darkness; but if England will but adhere to her simple, living, Protestant Christianity, we fear not her stability. Like the rock in mid ocean, at whose base the billow rolls, and dashes and breaks, she will stand secure, amid all those revolutions which the future may conceal, and which will make nations shake and reel to their very centre. The Bible, and the Bible only, contains the religion of Protestants. Protestantism is the very embodiment of Christian truth, and Christian truth is the one

great instrument for the regeneration and salvation of man. On His ascension, the Saviour gave it in charge to His Church to "go and disciple all the nations," promising them His continued presence, and the power of His Spirit. The proclamation of God's love to our fallen race; the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit; the doctrine of remission of sins through the sacrifice of the cross; the exclusion of all human merit from the ground of a sinner's justification; the purification of the whole nature through the operation of the Holy Ghost, with a life of corresponding practical godliness—these were the prime subjects of apostolic preaching, and before which the philosophy of Greece and the arms of Rome bowed in deep prostration. These were the doctrines which stirred the soul of Wycliffe and perfected the Reformation of Luther. And these are the doctrines which will conserve England, and make her first among the nations of the earth.

In looking back on the past, nothing can be more clear than that Providence has been the precursor of mercy, and has, from the very outgoings of time itself, been preparing the way for the establishment of that kingdom whose limits are the world, and whose duration is for ever. To this all things have been made to contribute. The rise and fall of empires, the changes and revolutions which have marked their history, with all the agencies and influences affecting their destiny, have been but so many antecedents to this great result.

From the beginning this has been the object of desire and anticipation — the subject of prediction and of prayer. It was a universal expectation that a period was coming, when a greater and more glorious kingdom would be set up in the world. We have only to open the prophetic volume, to perceive how accustomed holy men of God were to rise from the temporal to the spiritual, from the present to the future, from the earthly and the passing to the heavenly and the permanent. They carry us through myriads of events and ages of time, and leave us in fixed contemplation on the glories of that period, when the reign of grace shall be universal, and heaven be reflected from earth in its spiritual purity and blessedness. Thus in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, as given by Daniel, we find the Babylonish empire giving place to that of the Medes and Persians; this again succeeded by the Macedonian, and the Macedonian by the Roman, which was to break in pieces all the rest. But, in the progress of time, Rome itself was torn asunder by the incursion of barbarous tribes, and divided into ten kingdoms, corresponding to the ten toes in the image. This took place about the fourth century of the Christian era. But though the glory of that vast and mighty empire has passed away, these ten kingdoms still remain. They, too, are to be broken in pieces by the little stone cut out of the mountain. They must give way before the advancing kingdom of Christ. The day of their downfall is perhaps not far distant. But let the time be when it may, the appointed hour is approaching. The Papacy

has been smitten once and again. Nor can it stand; for it has in it nothing permanent. It shall be destroyed with the brightness of His coming, who will put down all rule, and all authority and power. With the downfall of Popery will come the destruction of every antichristian power; and on their ruins will rise, in all its greatness and glory, that kingdom which the God of heaven hath set up, which shall never be destroyed; for the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms; and it shall stand for ever.

NOTE ON WYCLIFFE'S WRITINGS.

Dr. Vaughan and Dr. Lechler have appended to their respective biographies of Wycliffe valuable and exhaustive catalogues of his voluminous writings in Latin and English. In 1865, a *Catalogue of the Original Works of John Wyclif*, by Dr. W. Shirley, Professor of Church History in Oxford, was published by Messrs. Macmillan and Co. "This work," says Lechler, "though very modest in bulk, was the fruit of considerable labour, and of correspondence and laborious collections reaching through ten or twelve years." Many of these are mere tracts or single discourses. A large number exist only in MS.; others have been published separately in recent years. Valuable collections of his writings have also been issued, the principal of which are the *Select English Works of John Wycliffe*, from original MS. by T. Arnold, published by Macmillan, in 1871, in three volumes; considerably earlier was an edition of *Tracts and Treatises of John de Wycliffe, D.D., with Selections and Translations from his MSS. and Latin Works*, by Dr. Vaughan, published for the Wycliffe Society in 1845; and some years anterior to this, *A Selection from the Writings of the Reverend and Learned John Wickliff, D.D.*, in the series of "British Reformers" issued by the Religious Tract Society. The last mentioned collection contains the two books by which as a great religious teacher and reformer Wycliffe produced the profoundest impression in his day. There are *The Poor Caitiff*, a collection of tracts on practical Christianity,

popularly written, and *The Wicket:* a Definition of the Eucharistic words, "This is My body." This was the tract of the great reformer most frequently noticed in the articles exhibited against the Lollards and in proclamations against heretical books. Twenty-one of Wycliffe's sermons are also included, with a few other tractates, in this useful compilation.

But the chief interest of the English reader will always be in Wycliffe's Translation of the English Bible. His *New Testament* was edited by the Rev. Henry Hervey Baber, M.A., in 1824, and republished in Bagster's *English Hexapla*, 1841. Another edition, showing considerable differences, was printed by Whittingham, in 1854, from a MS. of about 1380. But the chief edition of this priceless work, and the only one that contains the Old as well as the New Testament, is that edited by the Rev. Josiah Forshall and Sir Frederick Madden, printed at the Oxford University Press, 1850, in four volumes. This noble work occupied the learned editors for nearly twenty years, and in its preparation some one hundred and seventy MSS. were collated. A copious historical preface, notes, and a glossary render this edition invaluable to the student.

It must not be forgotten that Wycliffe was great in philosophy as well as in theology—in the dialectic of the Schools a consummate master: the pride as well as the terror of Oxford (*Milman*); while as to his literary merits, the same great critic observes that "as with his contemporary and most congenial spirit, Chaucer, rose English poetry, so was Wycliffe the father of English prose: rude, but idiomatic, Biblical in much of its picturesque phraseology, at once highly coloured by and colouring the translation of the Scriptures."

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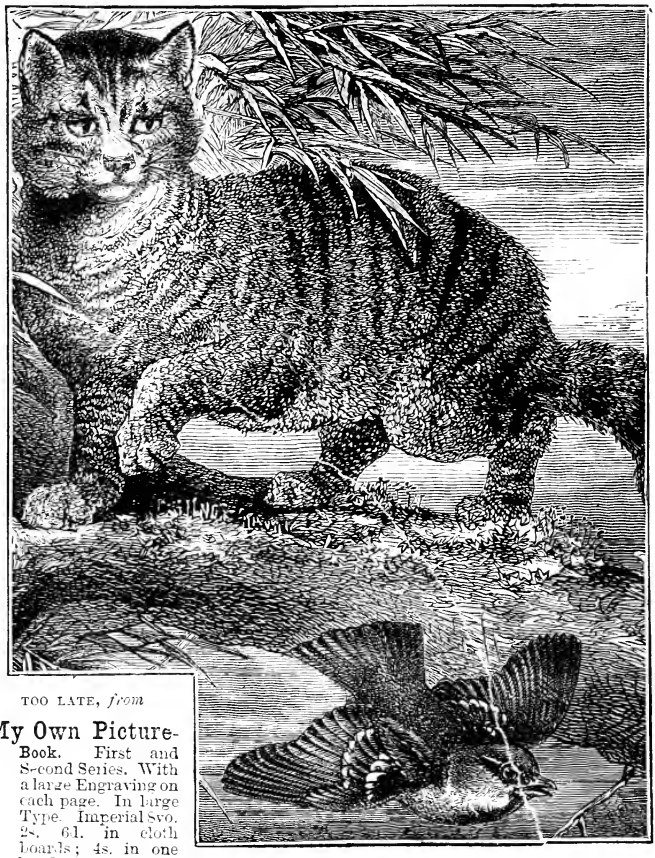

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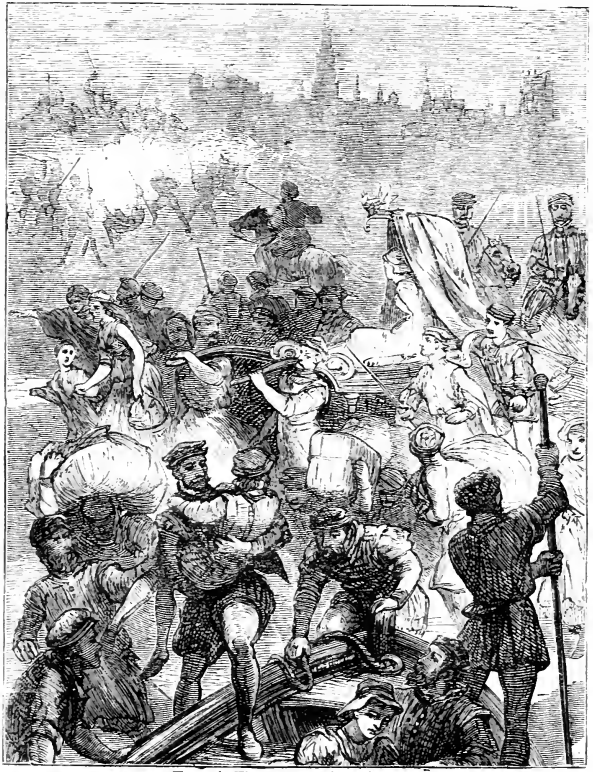

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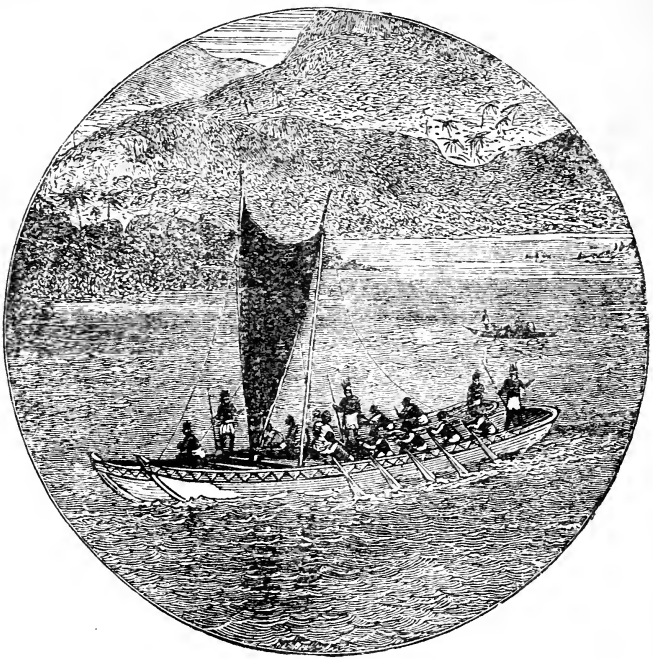

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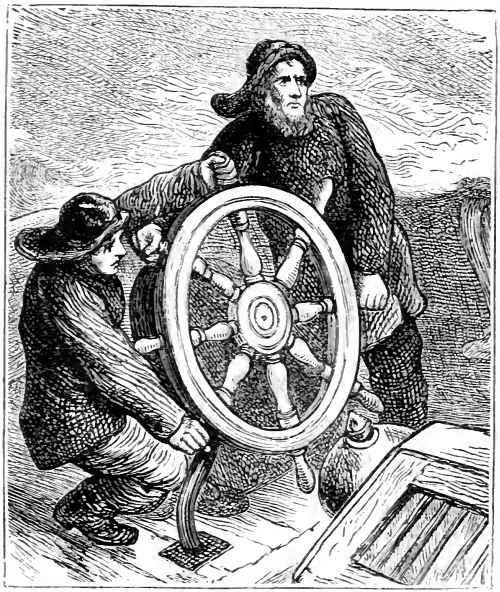

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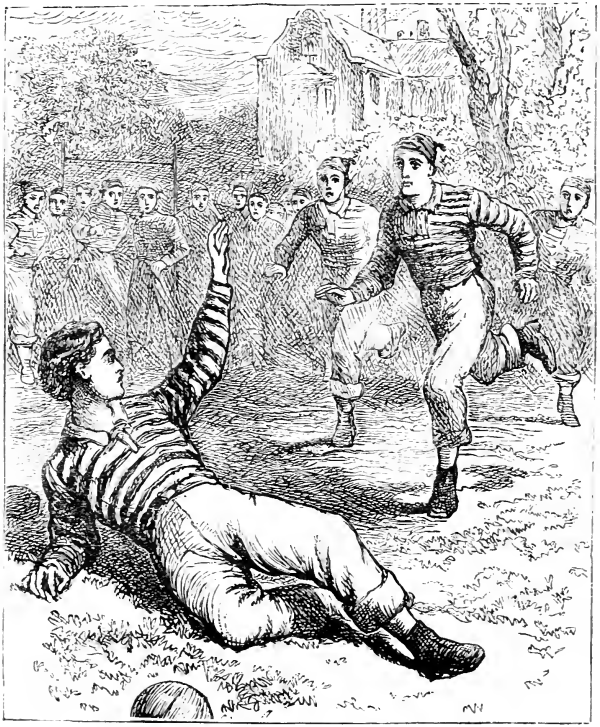

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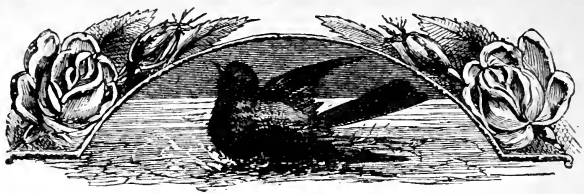

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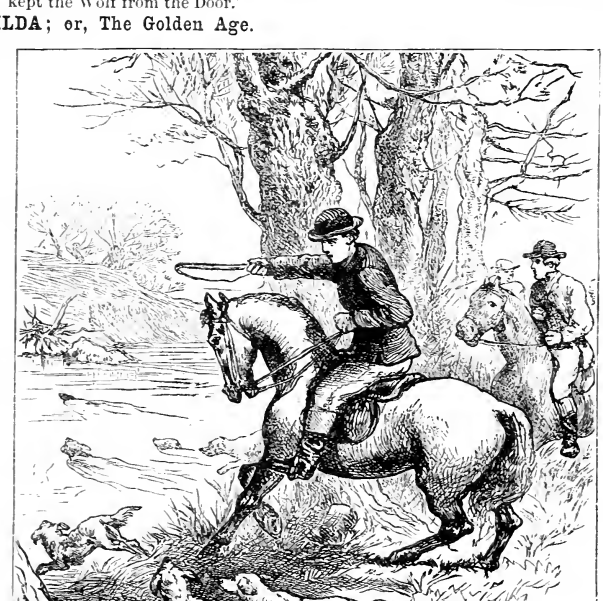

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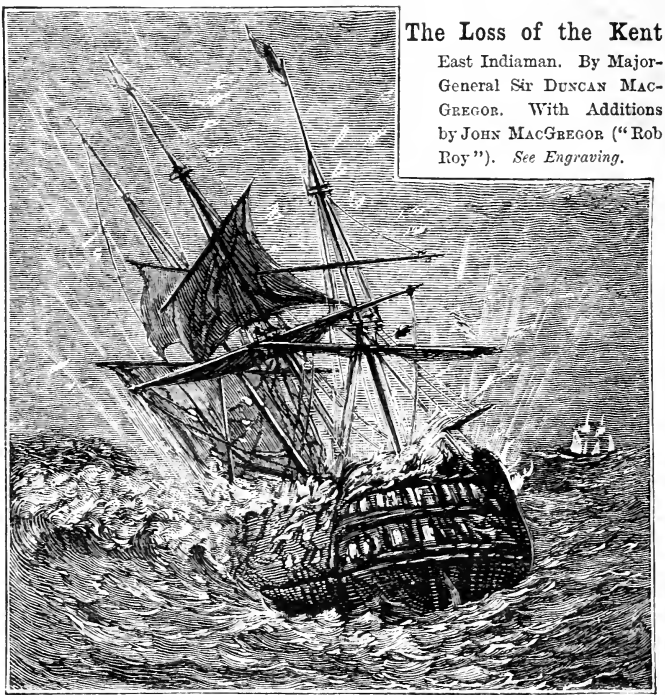

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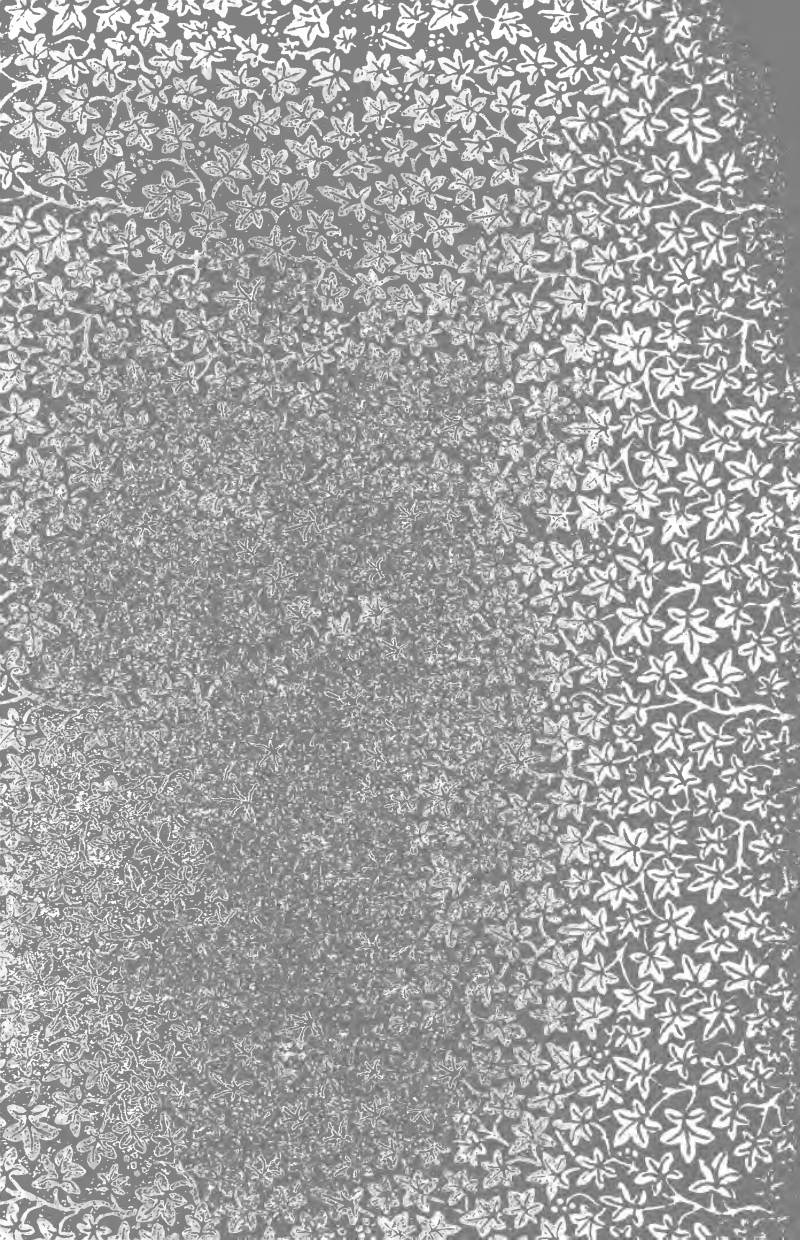

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